

The Evolution of White Racism
and its Impact on Black Society in America Today

By

Michael Soares

A thesis
presented to the University of Waterloo
in fulfillment of the
thesis requirement for the degree of
Master of Arts
in
History

Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 2018

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

This thesis examines the historical evolution of racial hierarchies and white racism in American society, and in particular how these ideological frameworks have impacted Black American society. By utilizing a case study approach, in order to fully identify the pervasive nature of white racial and cultural narratives and the ways they have denied Black progress and freedom, the goal is to outline how systemic incorporations of racialized stereotypes within political rhetoric and popular culture have worked to reinforce white racial hierarchies and white cultural paradigms. The three periods examined in this case study are as follows: the Post-Civil War American South, 1960's Civil Rights Era and the modern Hip Hop Generation. Misrepresentations within music, media and sports all too often resemble neo-colonial, paternalistic and racialized myths of the past. While politicians, particularly conservatives, have consistently used racialized messages to fan white fears and gain voter support with reactionary "law and order" rhetoric and by blaming minorities for American socio-economic problems. The criminalization of Blackness in American society is based on white fears, not relative crime rates. Whites, since the collapse of Reconstruction policies in the South, attempted to force Blacks back onto the plantations, railroads and iron mines of the South. Black criminality became the excuse for reinforcing racial hierarchy in American society, convict leasing replaced slavery in the South. Conservative politicians spewed forth racialized rhetoric to disenfranchise Black voters in the South, while lynching and race riots acted as violent methods to reinforce white domination and white racialized notions of Black inferiority. By the 1960s violence became a tool of the agents of the FBI to repress Black Power groups and their attempts to challenge white racial hierarchies

in America. However, by the late 60s racism and outright violence became unpopular and new more subtle, more systemic forms of reinforcing racial caste systems and white supremacy in American society were needed. The impacts of deindustrialization, white flight, gerrymandering, rezoning, political marginalization and the elimination of an entire generation of Black leaders needs to be discussed for someone to fully recognize the legacy of white racism. Politicians and popular culture today have come to support racial hierarchies either intentionally or unintentionally by consistently over representing Black criminality and pushing racialized images, that in many ways came eerily similar to Jim Crow representations of Blackness. From Blaxploitation Films to Gangster Rap and Hood Films, this thesis examines how white dominant cultural representations of Black Criminality have become embedded within American popular culture and politics, and how these racialized images and narratives have conditioned American society to accept white supremacist notions of race and crime.

Acknowledgements

The thesis is the result of years of study and reflection, I spent years attempting to discover exactly how I could make a difference and attempt to bring some love and understanding to a world that seems to get darker by the day. I hope that this thesis and my further scholarship will help to challenge dominant cultural narratives and racism in American society. History will always be my greatest passion in life and the purpose of any good historian is to challenge dominant social and cultural paradigms in order to fully separate fact from fiction. This thesis was inspired by several scholars and hip hop artists whose words and voices are seen throughout, I wish to acknowledge that their

contributions be it in songs, books and public debates greatly aided my efforts to fully extrapolate certain sections of my thesis. This completes my requirements for Master of Arts in History, but it does not end my fight against hate and intolerance, for that it is just a beginning.

First, I would like to acknowledge my supervisor Andrew Hunt for his unconditional support and for all of the kind words of encouragement that helped to push me forward. I could never have written this thesis without your guidance and wisdom, for all you have done for me over the last few years I will be forever grateful.

I would also like to acknowledge my committee members -- Francis Condon and John Sbardellati. Their continuous support and guidance were greatly appreciated and I will be always indebted to them for their contributions and support.

I would like to acknowledge my family and friends for all their support and words of encouragement, they always have had my back when I need them and I could not be where I am today without them.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge my girlfriend Krista for all of her love and for supporting me throughout my degree and all the struggles that comes with it.

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Introduction

In 1492, you came upon these shores; Seven hundred years educated by the Moors, 17th century-- genocide and the gun--, Middle Passage blessed to market the Africans, in the so called 'land of god", my kind were treated hard, from back then until now, I see and you agree, we have been a misrepresented people.

-Stevie Wonder, "Misrepresented People", *Bamboozled*, 2000.

In the book *America's Original Sin*, author Jim Wallis explains that, "racism (not slavery), is America's original sin and must be named as such.. [he identifies that] racism lingers far more pervasively in implicit and covert ways in American institutions and culture, in often unconscious attitudes, and in the very structures of our society".¹ Wallis published this book in 2016 just after the Charleston massacre, where a white supremacist opened fire in a predominantly Black church and murdered nine Black congregants. His hope was that this atrocity would open American eyes to the blatant white supremacist beliefs and attitudes, that still pervades throughout American society more than a century and a half later. Racism has been used throughout American history as a political tool to maintain social control and racial hierarchy, this will be the primary focus of this paper.

Poor and working class whites have been conditioned to view and fear those who are perceived and labeled as "other," with contempt and to see their own skin color as a badge of privilege and status. Having someone below you economically, socially and politically allows for one to see themselves as superior and accepted. Under these circumstances, blame for a wide range of social ills- from unemployment to cuts in

¹ Jim Wallis, *America's Original Sin: Racism, White Privilege, and the Bridge to a New America*, (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016) xv-xvi.

social spending- can be placed at the feet of those who are seen as “outsiders” and/or “other,” creating a positive heuristic psychological response and alleviating the social anxieties of economic and social hardships. For instance, when Donald Trump was running for president he blamed Mexican immigrants for “stealing” Americans jobs and economic welfare, this is obviously a simple (albeit illogical and racialized) solution to a complex problem. The solutions intent is not to solve the problem, but to create a socially conditioned response that reinforces the dominant political narrative and to invoke white fear to solidify racial and class assumptions and prejudices. Trump encouraged police brutality against protesters at his political rallies in 2016, even referring to himself as the “law and order” candidate, repeatedly. In the post-Civil Rights era, where overt violence against minorities (i.e. lynching and race riots) became socially unacceptable, these rhetorical devices became the political tools of white supremacy and social control.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore three pivotal periods in American history to help to bring a better understanding of the root causes of racism, the attempts of white society to maintain racial hierarchy and the ways in which Black society was impacted by these beliefs. The main goal is understanding the fundamental concepts within American racism and white supremacy, and the methods in which those ideologies have hindered and perverted Black progress and the Black popular image within American society. This paper will utilize case studies of three important eras: The Post-Civil War period from the late 1860s to about 1895, the Civil Rights Era from 1960 to the early 70s and the Hip Hop Generation of the late 80s till the present. The main themes will be, the post-reconstruction assault on Black suffrage, freedom and civil

rights; to the counter-subversion of Black Power during the late 1960s; and following throughout the racialized popular cultural images of blacks and how they evolved in the eras of Blaxploitation films and gangster rap.

When setting out to write this paper I was confronted with the dilemma of whether to specialize my research into just one period be it the post-Civil War period, Civil Rights Era or more recent Hip Hop Generation. My choice to not limit my thesis to only one of these periods was a conscious choice as i feel that looking at this history in a vacuum presents certain misconceptions and falsehoods that greatly hinder one's complete understanding of the pervasiveness and evolution of white racism and black resistance. Although, I do utilize several black voices and methods of resistance. Black resistance and reactions to white supremacism (race riots, boycotts, sit-ins, protests and all other permutations), although very important to this history, are not the main focus of this paper and many scholarly works have already brought much of this history to life.² My main focus in this paper is to understand how white fears, prejudices and ideologies have been conditioned by racialized pop-culture, conservative political reactions, pseudo-scientific theories and white violence meant to reinforce class solidarity by blaming economic and social ills on those perceived as "other". In not limiting my research to just one period, it allows for a deeper comprehension of the ways in which white fears and the Black popular image has evolved following in line with the permutations of white racism. The hope, then, is that my work gives justice to those

² *The Jackson County War* by Daniel R. Weinfield provides an excellent lense into white violence and black resistance in Post Civil War Florida; *Uncle Tom's Children* published in 1938 highlights many of the methods of black resistance in Post-Civil War society and see James W. Button, *Black Violence Political Impact of the 1960's Riots* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978) for an overview of the race riots and black resistance of the 1960's.

both Black and white who have challenged white supremacy and racial hierarchies as unscientific, imperialistic and morally repugnant.

Chapter 1

The Reconstruction Era and The Guise of Progress

The American Civil War ended in 1865 with the North victorious over the South. The war broke out for several reasons including states rights, disputes over the role of the federal government, yet the biggest factor for the war was no doubt the ever present institution of Slavery. Abraham Lincoln did not seek out to become the great emancipator of Blacks and it would not be until the end of the war that he declared the Emancipation Proclamation. Slaves were then fully free following this document, or so were told.

Initially, the Federal government through Reconstruction and institutions such as the Freedmen's Bureau greatly improved the plight of Black Americans in the South. Reconstruction rid the South of Slave Codes for a time. Slave Codes, passed decades prior to the Civil War outlawed education, literacy and social gatherings all were designed to keep Blacks uneducated and illiterate. This meant that most slaves could not defend themselves in court, read, write, organize and/or succeed in a democratic capitalist economy and society. The organizations and aims of Congressional Reconstruction were to uplift Black Americans and allow them to have a fair chance at a decent life. They not only provided social services, some education and organizational structures for Black American labor unions, they also provided protection from southern white supremacist violence. Yet, by 1874 the support for Reconstruction in the South from the North withered away, by 1877 it was gone completely (some argue this did not fully dissipate until 1890).³ Conservative white supremacist ideologies would come to

³ LaRae Umfleet, *1898 Wilmington Race Riot Report* (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 2006), 18. Retrieved from: <http://digital.ncdcr.gov/cdm/ref/collection/p249901coll22/id/5842>.

overshadow the attempts by abolitionists and their liberal white supporters to fully allow blacks to integrate into American society.

Returning Confederate soldiers, broke and now slave-less plantation owners and lawless bands of southern whites sought to control the countrysides that could not be occupied by Union troops and agents of the Freedmen's Bureau.⁴ The bureau was created in 1865 by the U.S. Congress and tasked to the Department of War in order to assist former slaves in their transition to freedmen and women, they made promises of land, freedom and protection from white southerners who had nothing but contempt and fear in seeing their former slaves being freed and being promised land.⁵ New laws gave the agency the power to divide land confiscated by the federal government, who then parceled out plantation lands to freedmen for a period of three years, after which they could purchase and own.

Southern fears of Black reparations, power and revenge came to dominate the southern psyche and the federal government was not willing to risk the alienation of the southern states which they wanted to bring back into the Union. President Andrew Johnson, a southerner, was certainly no abolitionist and he slowly withdrew support for Reconstruction and essentially for Blacks in the South in order to bring many states back into the U.S. (Johnson was vice president under Lincoln and became president after his assassination). Southern whites would not accept Blacks as equal and certainly

Also see David M. Oshinsky, *Worse Than Slavery: Parchman Farm and the Ordeal of Jim Crow Justice*, (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 28.

⁴ James G. Hollandsworth Jr., *An Absolute Massacre: The New Orleans Race Riot of July 30, 1866*, (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 1-2. Also see Ida B. Wells-Barnett, "On Lynchings: Southern Horrors", *The American Negro: His History and Literature*, (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), 20-21, for a description of the rise of lawlessness and lynchings in the South.

⁵ Donald H. Henderson, *The Negro Freedmen: Life Conditions of the American Negro in the Early Years After Emancipation*, (New York: Henry Schuman Inc, 1952), 4. Also see LaWanda Cox, "The Promise of Land for the Freedmen," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 45, no. 3 (1958): 413-40.

did not want to see them own the same land they had been enslaved on a few years before. An incident recounted in *Slavery by Another Name*, that occurred in Greene County exemplifies this reality, after “hundreds of former slaves filed suit against white landowners in 1868,... whites responded by burning down the courthouse”.⁶

The first Black generation to grow up free was coming of age by 1890 and these new freedmen were taking advantage of their ability to move to cities and look for better work, housing and above all, social mobility. Free Black Americans in the South slowly began to migrate into southern cities and by 1910 many would join in the Great Migration to the North. This was an attempt to make their own way in American society and eliminate the growing threat of white supremacist violence, yet the North was not so progressive as it may have seemed and although northern whites would fight a war to end slavery, they were not willing to allow Blacks true equality or freedom. In the South, racism and racial violence towards minorities was steadily increasing as the Democratic party and “white radicals began to use strident racist rhetoric to win elections”.⁷

Prior to this conservative backlash, free Blacks in the South were able to obtain unity with some lower class whites as the Populist Party attempted to offer agrarian reforms and labor rights. This created a cooperative between lower class black and white farmers, “for a moment, some historians argue, class outweighed race”.⁸ Ann Collins believes that it was not until the mid 1890’s, following the Panic of 1893 (it is

⁶ Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery By Another Name: The Re-enslavement of Black Americans From the Civil War to World War II*, (New York: Anchor Books, 2009), 18. Also see Umfleet, *1898 Wilmington Riot Report*, 26, for an example of the methods conservative elites of both planting and gentry classes used to control Wilmington politics.

⁷ Ann V. Collins, *All Hell Broke Loose: American Race Riots From the Progressive Era through World War II*, Praeger Series on American Political Culture (Denver: Praeger, 2012), 14. Also see Wells-Barnett, “A Red Record” in *The American Negro: His History and Literature*, 9.

⁸ *Ibid*, Also see David R. Roediger, *Colored Whites: Transcending the Racial Past* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 194-5, for an explanation of Black-white workers alliances and union cooperatives in the Post-Civil War period.

very interesting how periods of increased racial violence generally followed economic recessions) and southern conservative political campaigns aimed at subjugating and disenfranchising blacks, that white supremacism and racial violence towards blacks greatly increased. Indeed, in her book *All Hell Broke Loose*, she explains how “political consideration played a considerable role in many American Race Riots from the Progressive era to World War II”. She describes how the 1898 Wilmington race riot was the direct result of campaigns and actions taken by the Democratic Party to attack black voting rights and political presence.

White fears were not absolute or spontaneous they were the direct result of political and social conditioning. Conservative reactions to a unified lower class and towards Black suffrage and political power are obvious when one views racism as a political tool used to reinforce white domination. Economic conditions played a very large role in white fear, when the economy was thriving race relations were at their height and when there was a depression or times got tough, Blacks were usually the first to be blamed.

White Fear And The Suppression of Post-Civil War Black Suffrage and Society

Violence and intimidation aimed at Black Americans and support for a racial caste hierarchy was not only seen in the south, northern racism and resistance to black equality was widespread In the years following the American Civil War. Even though the majority of Americans did not own slaves they harbored and accepted many of the racial prejudices and white supremacist ideology that slavery was based upon. Following emancipation white society was not willing to accept blacks as full citizens,

equals and in some cases as humans. In an article written in 1885 for the *Afro-American*, a Ohio based Black newspaper, titled "The Silent South" the author quotes George W. Cable, while they address the lack of support for Black suffrage from northern republicans. Southern racial violence and white supremacist ideology kept Blacks from true freedom in the south, yet as this article signifies it was northern politicians unwillingness to give their full support for the black vote that was truly hindering black progress, as: "The reason why the Negro vote is a divided vote in the north to-day, and in the south, shows more signs of dividing than ever before is, that the Republican party has grown fat and lazy concerning civil rights".⁹

The lack of support for Reconstruction policies from northern republicans enable Southern democrats to slowly reinsert white rule, the lack of political will from the North left Blacks open to racist violence in the South. Hon. William R. Steward in a pamphlet, titled "An Address to the African Americans of Ohio", writes about the brutal anti-Black violence and repression of Black voters by armed thugs allegedly hired by Democratic candidate John R. Mclean. He describes how the Democratic party was now attempting to ally themselves with black voters and points out the irony of this position as, "countless, merciless and fiendish atrocities [have been] committed on our race in the south by the democratic party... Which now asks for our votes".¹⁰ Steward then goes on to outline the actions of Mclean and the Democratic party in the North in their attempts to suppress Black voting and civil rights, he describes how:

On election day, in October of 1895, [Mcleans] hired gang of thugs, some of whom were policemen, committed upon our race and the ballot-box, the most infamous outrages that ever

⁹ *The Afro-American*, "The Silent South", September 19, 1885, Vol.4, No.2, 1.

¹⁰ William R. Steward, *An Address to the African Americans of Ohio*, "The Records of the Parties and the Men," 1899.

disgraced the great state of Ohio. His agents and criminal hirelings clubbed and mobbed our people at the polls, and in order to prevent them from voting arrested them by wholesale and confined them in a damp and dark cellar until the polls were closed. They were not even suspected of a crime, but were respectable members of our race who could not be bought with boodle.¹¹

The suppression of Black suffrage in the South stands as an early example of how white society is willing to succumb to sheer violence in order to maintain racial hierarchies in America. In his book, *An Absolute Massacre*, James Hollandsworth details events in Louisiana that came to a head in late July of 1866. As Black Civil War soldiers and supporters of black suffrage marched on a state convention being held within the halls of the Mechanics Institute in Louisiana, a separate group of ex-confederates and white supremacists gathered to prevent it. Black veterans and marchers were attacked by the mob who spewed forth racialized violence in a desperate attempt to maintain white domination.¹² The rioters then descended upon the convention and forcefully put an end to black voting rights in Louisiana. White supporters of suffrage for African Americans were forced to concede to white racist brutality and black voting rights would be under attack and contested throughout the south for decades prior to the Second World War.

W.E.B. Du Bois can be seen as representative of the Black response to white racialized violence in post-civil war America. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, he laments the social and political conditions of Black Americans following emancipation, the extreme racial discrimination, the lack of any real support for free blacks from white society and

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Gilles Vidal, *The New Orleans Riot of 1866: Anatomy of a Tragedy*, (University of Louisiana: The Centre for Louisiana Studies, 1983), 171. Also see Hollandsworth, *An Absolute Massacre*, 2-3.

the harsh reality that the only real help will need to come from blacks themselves. He writes that, "We must accept some of the race prejudice of the South as a fact, -- deplorable in its intensity, unfortunate in result, and dangerous for the future, but nevertheless a hard fact which only time can efface".¹³ He even goes on to explain that Blacks "cannot hope that the mass of whites can be brought to assume that close sympathetic and self-sacrificing leadership of blacks which their present situation so eloquently demands," and that "Such leadership, such social teaching and example, must come from Blacks themselves".¹⁴ Du Bois was not a segregationists in any way, he did believe whites and blacks could cohabitate, just not before white prejudice and power could be challenged and overthrown.

Du Bois means to transmit several points in this scholarly work, the major point that he is trying to get across is that blacks have been thrown into a society that has been conditioned to see blacks as inferior, they have been denied education, economic reparations, social mobility and true political representation. He questions the actual desire of white society to allow blacks true freedom, he remarks about the illusory belief that blacks could be protected from whites by the ballot. The real issue of how to shield Blacks from white supremacists who sought to re-enslave them is discussed by Du Bois. He describes how politics at this time was becoming more about selfish political pursuits and began to "regard public office as a private prerequisite" to build up their

¹³ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Ed. Brent Hayes Edwards (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 116.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* In Wells-Barnett, "Red Record," 22-3, we can see a similar sentiment, yet she believes that Blacks needed to resist white lynchings and oppression by defending the Black popular image and utilizing their withdrawal of economic power if their condition did not improve.

careers rather than fulfill the promises of past governments.¹⁵ At this time most honest politicians “left politics alone” and “in this state of mind it became easy to wink at the suppression of the Negro vote in the South,” many northerners “who neglected their own civic duties grew hilarious over the exaggerated importance... of the Black vote”.¹⁶

Racial Hierarchy, Social Darwinism and Southern Paternalism

Many whites in Post-Civil War American society maintained the same ideological beliefs about Black inferiority that they held before the war, especially in the South. These white racist narratives would shape the logic of white supremacy in American history and still lingers albeit in different more subtle forms in many people. Southern Paternalism is an ideology that became both a justification and a rationalization for the moral good of slavery in both the pre and post emancipation periods. The paternalist myth is the assumption, predominantly from elite planters, that Blacks are fundamentally incapable of self-rule and that without white slave-masters, they would revert back to savagery and barbarism. John H. Van Evrie, when comparing slave labor to British lower class laborers in his influential 1853 pamphlet *Negroes and Negro Slavery*, perfectly articulated the paternalist argument, he states that:

The Negro is governed by those *naturally* superior, and is in the best condition of any portion or branch of his race, while the British laborer is in the *worst* condition of any of *his* race...., The first

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 117. Also see Annette Gordon-Reed, “What If Reconstruction Hadn’t Failed?,” *The Atlantic*, October 26, 2015, for a more in depth argument for the northern retreat from Reconstruction in the 1870’s.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 117.

is secure in all the rights that nature gives him, the latter is practically denied all or nearly all of his-the first is protected and provided for by those the Creator has designed should govern him.¹⁷

This racialized paternalistic justification for slavery attempted to utilize both religious and so called scientific arguments to further white supremacist ideologies. It is interesting how this author sees the British laborer as the one being denied nearly all of his natural rights, but the Black slave as “secure in all the rights that nature gives him”. The paternalistic myth relied on racist biblical arguments that attempted to show slavery as a natural condition that was initiated by god, many southern planters actually saw themselves as missionaries who were civilizing African Americans.

The reality was that Southern Paternalism, although being widely accepted by most elite planters, was not a convincing enough argument for most whites within American society. George Fredrickson writes that, “the overwhelming majority of antebellum southerners owned no slaves... many aspired to be planters [but], there is little evidence that they accepted a reactionary social philosophy or even understood it”.¹⁸ According to the 1860 census, 26 percent of all households in the South owned slaves with Mississippi having the highest ratio of slave owners at 49.1%. Less than two thirds of all Southern households owned slaves and 72 percent of those owned fewer than 10 slaves.¹⁹ Large plantations were extremely rare and in many ways were

¹⁷ John H. Van Evrie, *Negroes and Negro “Slavery”: The First an Inferior Race: The Latter It’s Normal Condition*, (Baltimore, 1853), 30-31. Also see George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in The White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny 1817-1914*, (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1971), 63.

¹⁸ Fredrickson, *The Black Image*, 66. Also see John C. Perry, *Myths & Realities of American Slavery: The True History of Slavery in America*, (Shippensburg: Burd Street Press, 2002), 96-7

¹⁹ Joseph C. G. Kennedy, *Population of the United States in 1860: Compiled From The Original Returns of the Eight Census*, U.S. 1860 Census Data, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864) iv-xii, Recounted and analysed in Perry, *Myths & Realities of American Slavery*, 96-7.

southern myths, like those seen in *Gone With the Wind* meant to perpetuate the southern paternalistic myth.²⁰ Most white Americans would only learn about blacks through popular culture that was intentionally meant to degrade African Americans, while conservative Democrats fueled white fears and psyches of Black criminals, vagrants and rapists.

Southern Paternalism was strong within states of the Deep or Lower South as these states relied more heavily on slave labor. These states were the leading cotton producers and most counties had equal or greater proportions of Blacks than whites. Paranoia and white fear of Black revolt, Black revenge and increased Black Power from voting rights all were heightened by the fact that many whites were outnumbered in these regions. Fredrickson explains that, "Most of the paternalist ideologies were from Virginia and South Carolina the most conservative states," these were also the leading confederate states and they contained a large portion of elite planter families.²¹

Outside of these states the paternalist myth did not hold as much weight and many lower and middle class whites throughout the American South were not sold on Southern Paternalism as a rationalization for Black inferiority. Instead, white supremacist elements would need to repackage their ideas in order for them to be more appealing to the lower classes. The result was Herrenvolk Democracy and/or what Fredrickson refers to as "egalitarian racism." Essentially, this is a form of democracy in which only the dominant ethnic group, (whites) participates in politics and minority groups in this case (blacks) are kept from participating in government.

²⁰ Perry, *Myths & Realities of American Slavery*, 96-7.

²¹ Fredrickson, *Black Image*, 66. Also See Perry, *Myths & Realities*, 96-99, to get a sense of the disparity in Black/white populations, especially in the Deep South. These population statistics show why these regions were so infused with Southern Paternalist ideology and ruled by white fear. The answer is simple: Blacks exponentially outnumbered whites in these regions.

Religious defenders of racial hierarchy and Black inferiority in the late 1800s saw whites as “civilizing” Black Americans through slavery and this belief was widespread before and after the Civil War. Many 19th and 20th century writers dedicate whole books to attempt to defend the institution of slavery as a moral good and that it is actually “uplifting” Blacks from their primitive state. Take John Bell Robinson’s book *Pictures of Slavery and Anti-Slavery* published in 1863 for example, Robinson is supposedly impartial, but is highly prejudice towards black freedmen. Robinson uses several biblical quotes in an attempt to connect slavery with biblical teachings, he references Genesis ix. 20 to 27 inclusive, as a moral defence for slavery. In this text, God curses Canaan and makes him a servant of Shem, the quote states that, “Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall be unto his brethren. Blessed be the Lord God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.”²² Robinson is highly religious and sees the bible as the ultimate guide for moral conduct, in this passage he mentions that the original translation should have been slave not servant. He sees this incident as the “first introduction of slavery into our world, after the flood,” in his view this was also a green light from god that accepted slavery as moral and justified.²³ Like all other pro-slavery and southern paternalist apologists he does not believe Blacks can rule themselves. Robinson articulates this sentiment, stating that:

No white race has ever taken the African on an equality who did not sink down to their level;... I shall say enough of the incompetency of the African race for self-government, and their level

²² John Bell Robinson, *Pictures of Slavery and Anti-Slavery :Advantages of Negro Slavery and the Benefits of Negro Freedom*, 1863, Reprinted by (Miami: Mnemosyne Publishing, 1969),18-19.

²³ *ibid.*

when left to themselves with power in their hands. In that we can read our doom whenever universal emancipation shall prevail in this whole country.²⁴

Pseudo-scientific institutions in the late 19th century were fueled by Social Darwinism and imperialist racial hierarchies, so called “scientific theories” attempted to rank human beings based on their physiological, mental and so called racial characteristics. The most widely read ‘scientific’ book of the antebellum era was *Types of Mankind* by Josiah Nott and George Glidden. In this book the authors attempt to use the images of an ape and a chimpanzee alongside Black images, to show the “inherent inferiority of blacks,” basically trying to claim that blacks were one step above monkeys. The images of ape and chimp skulls were placed alongside Black images along with the “fully evolved” European skull that supposedly showed the superiority of European brains. Indeed, these comparisons were attempting to support the author's argument that “blacks were more akin to apes than humans.”²⁵ These images were nothing more than racist attempts to justify slavery, social darwinism and survival of the fittest evolutionary ideologies prevalent within capitalist societies in the late 19th century.

Many books and articles published at the end of the 19th century attempted to associate Blacks with savagery and inferiority, in many ways these were direct attacks on Black American progress which fueled white fears. Articles published in the *Atlantic Monthly* by Nathaniel Shaler and Edwin Rowan Helper's *The Negroes in Negroland* both took different paths to come to the same conclusion: that Blacks were not equal to whites and that freedom and suffrage would only degrade American society and politics.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 38-9. Also see Nathaniel S. Shaler, “The Negro Problem,” *Atlantic Monthly*, 54 (1884), 697-98.

²⁵ Josiah Nott and George Glidden, *Types of Mankind: or Ethnological Researches* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo, 1855). Also see Samuel George Morton, *Crania Americana*, (1839).

Shaler invoked images of slave revolts in Haiti and Jamaica to highlight so called “barbaric” tendencies of Blacks. When discussing the Haitian revolution, Shaler wrote that, “[blacks] were a people without a trace of promise except that of extinction through disease and sloth, [they] had fallen through its freedom to a state that is but savagery with a little veneer of european custom”.²⁶

Shaler also saw this same pattern in Jamaica which in his mind “had now become a land of barbarism,” in a sense Shaler was trying to use these as examples of how Blacks cannot rule themselves without white masters. Regardless of how disadvantaged, discriminated against or alienated former slave peoples were from the european peoples who had once enslaved them. Helper was more in line with social darwinian beliefs that attempted to associate Blacks with apes and define them as sub-human. Helper was one of the first to attach criminality explicitly with race, he combined both the religious and so called scientific arguments to call for Black disenfranchisement. He laments how, “terrible things await a nation bent on handing the ballot to beast,” and that “May God, forbid that we should ever do this most foul and wicked thing”.²⁷ Shaler and Helper both articulate the most prominent white supremacist racial theories of the time and the ways in which they justified their racism to the broader white American community.

While discussing the ways in which Americans remember slavery, Edward E. Baptist, a historian at Cornell University, explained in 2014 that the idea of “slavery as a

²⁶ Nathaniel S. Shaler, “The Negro Problem,” *Atlantic Monthly*, 54 (1884), 697-98; Also see Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime and The Making of Modern Urban America*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 17.

²⁷ Edwin Rowan Helper, *The Negroes in Negroland; the Negroes in America; and Negroes Generally: Also The Several Races of White Men, Considered as the Involuntary and Predestined Supplanters of the Black Races* (New York: Carlton, 1868), viii-xiv.

school in which patient masters and mistresses trained irresponsible savages for futures of perpetual servitude,” has been completely proven false.²⁸ He explains how up until the end of World War 2, this belief was common among whites in both the North and the South. The image of Blacks as “beast-like” and unrestrained “savages,” that pervaded the paternalist myth of happy slaves and benevolent masters, came to dominate post Civil War American society. Many Americans accepted the white supremacist and paternalist myths that attempted to use “science” to create racial hierarchies and justify slavery, colonialism and white power. The idea of a caste system came to dominate white supremacist imperialism from India to South Africa and throughout the United States. Whites in the South and many in the North eventually would come to accept a set of assumptions that Blacks were lazy, unorganized and inherently criminals that needed white leaders (i.e. paternalistic myth) to control and “civilize” them and to keep them from vagrancy and “committing crimes”.

Like their pre-Civil War forebears, white supremacists of post-Civil War era needed to justify their sins, evil and immorality by neglecting the very humanity of Black Americans. Paternalist ideologies worked in the lower south, but was not convincing enough to most Americans, Herrenvolk Democracy was needed so that lower class whites would accept the subordination of Black Americans to second class citizens. Racial order and white domination needed to be maintained, violence was the most common form of white power and was used to brutalize Blacks for centuries. However, violence may not have been the most devastating form of oppression; the ideological framing of Blacks as subhuman with racist caricatures, and the social stigma of

²⁸ Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism*, (New York: Basic Books, 2014), xvii.

criminality that was placed upon black identity has been much more harmful to Blacks over time than any outburst of white brute force.

Toms, Coons and the Development of Racialized Popular Culture

By the end of the nineteenth century and the birth of the twentieth, new forms of entertainment allowed for cultural images and ideas to be projected through the new invention of the motion picture. The majority of the early films were very short and generally only lasted a few scenes, at most a few minutes. This truncated form of transmitting images through a camera and a screen, (all of the first films were silent films as sound was not added until the first talkies in the 1920's) was a revolutionary conception. Within a century motion pictures would become one of the greatest American achievements and in time, Hollywood would become the mecca for filmmakers all over the globe with movies being one of the greatest American exports. However, the first films that helped to develop this successful innovation were almost all filled with racist stereotypical images that attempted to piggyback off of the popularity of minstrel shows. Essentially, minstrel shows were popular stage shows that consisted of blackface entertainers (white actors who adorned a blackface of burnt cork), who degraded Black American people and culture through numerous racial stereotypes meant to demean and showcase their "racial inferiority".

The main goal of blackface, minstrel shows and later the early motion picture was not only to entertain, but also, to reinforce white racist assumptions and beliefs. The caricatures used in these forms of popular culture were entirely contrived by whites, although sometimes Blacks would play these roles, it must be understood these were

the only roles open to Blacks until well after World War II. Some Blacks made the best of the situation and attempted to become blackface performers themselves, many were very successful at doing so. Bert Williams and George Walker would become very popular blackface actors (even though they were Black), their main attractions were the blues and ragtime, or (“coon song”), hits such as “Nobody” they would perform. Far from the typical submissive caricature, Williams and Walker attempted to use this medium to showcase the “profound humanity” of Blacks, while challenging the “status quo at every opportunity”.²⁹ They took the roles, the only roles white society would allow them, and used this to subvert American minds and cultural conceptions of blacks. Although they were extremely talented performers, their major success was not allowing themselves to become caricatures and/or stereotypes. Even the name of one of their most popular shows, *He’s Up Against The Real Thing Now*, is daring white blackface actors to step up to their level and stop simply regurgitating the same racial stereotypes.³⁰

The fact that some African Americans were able to break into these forms of popular culture and offer subversive images and sounds, did not change the white supremacist ideological framing and conditioning that would dominate American society throughout the twentieth century. Robert C. Toll in a very well written 1978 article titled “Behind the Blackface,” writes that, “only very recently have black performers been able to break out of the singing, dancing, and comedy roles that have for so long perpetuated the image of blacks as a happy, musical people who would rather play than work, rather

²⁹ Stephanie Dunson, “Black Misrepresentation in Nineteenth Century Sheet Music Illustration,” in *Beyond Blackface: African Americans and the Creation of American Popular Culture, 1890-1930*, Ed. W. Fitzhugh Brundage, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 60-61. Also see “He’s Up Against The Real Thing Now,” *National Museum of African American History and Culture*, Washington, D.C. Accessed from: https://nmaahc.si.edu/object/nmaahc_2014.275.15.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

frolic than think”.³¹ Toll articulates the unfortunate reality for most Black actors prior to the 1950’s.

These misrepresentations were so prolific that they received their own stereotypical caricatures to depict the repetitive popular images of Blacks that were promoted by white society. The images of the Tom, Coon, Buck and Mammy dominated early American films, movies and stage shows. Donald Bogle describes, The Tom as “Good Negro characters,” who “keep the faith and n’er turn on their white massas, [The Tom] remains hearty, submissive, stoic, generous..., they ender themselves to white audiences and emerge as heroes”.³² Bill Robinson, Clarence Muse and James B. Lowe star of the film remake of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1927), were the most well known actors to play these roles and turned in outstanding performances. “Coons” were harmless, innocent and were generally seen as buffoonish caricatures that were lazy, comical and oblivious. Bogle identifies Stepin Fetchit as the prototypical coon, Willie Best and Will Rogers were popular actors who played these roles, he also sees the uncle remus character as a similar representation and that all these images were meant to continuously, “indicate the Black man’s satisfaction with the system and his place in it”.³³ Mammies were the caring, compassionate and loyal Black maids in white households who generally took care of the house and kids: cooking, cleaning, reading, listening and supervising for white families. Hattie Mcdaniels was one of the most prominent Mammy figures in Hollywood films, yet the logo for Aunt Jemima Syrup and Pancakes is probably the most widely known.

³¹ Robert C. Toll, “Behind The Blackface: Minstrel Men and Minstrel Myths”, *American Heritage*, Vol. 29 Iss. 3, April/May, 1978.

³² Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons and Mulattos: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films*, (New York: Continuum, 1989), 4-5.

³³ *Ibid*, 8. Also see Dunson, *Black Misrepresentation*.

Whites recycled this racialized imagery attempting to promote the idea that Blacks were content with their place in American society. They wanted not only whites to believe this but they were trying to convince Blacks as well. Early cartoons would also be filled with such racist imagery and most of the early cartoons such as Felix the Cat, Mickey Mouse and Bugs Bunny were all stolen or evolved directly from Blackface caricatures and stereotypes. Felix and Mickey are both completely derived from blackface, while Bugs Bunny's mannerisms and slang is borrowed from Black B-bop and Jazz.³⁴ From Stage Shows to Hollywood and TV cartoons, although not always in the most dignifying of ways, Blacks have always been a constant influencer of American popular culture.³⁵

Before we move on it is important to note that the release of the film *Birth of a Nation* (1915) by D. W. Griffith was one of the more important pop-cultural artifacts that helps to bring the white supremacist narrative into focus. *Nation* is the story of two white families one northern, one southern, who must fight each other in the war, but in the end realize that Blacks and radical Republicans are the real enemy. They depict Blacks (who are really whites adorning blackface) as savage brutes who take over congress and work in concert with pro-black whites to undermine white supremacist rule in the South. Blacks in *Nation* are constantly feared as threats to the purity of whites, especially women who are shown as the primary targets of Black anger and an "uncontrollable lust" for raping white women. In the end, the Klu Klux Klan rides in to

³⁴ Christopher P. Lehman, *The Colored Cartoon: Black Representation in American Animated Short Films, 1907-1954*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), 15- 24.

³⁵ See J. Emmett Winn, *Documenting Racism: African Americans in U.S. Department of Agriculture Documentaries, 1921-42*, (New York: Continuum, 2012). 81-4 & 108-114, for a discussion of how these racialized stereotypes were not only influencing popular films, but also racist imagery and ideologies were prevalent in many government and state documentaries of the time.

save the day, and the white women, from the Black “brutes” who have taken over the South. *Nation* was hailed by many whites as a revolutionary film, “that writes history with lightning”, and it was shown by President Woodrow Wilson as the first feature length film to ever be shown at the White House.³⁶ *Nation* helps to showcase the early paternalistic and white supremacist myths and how they became embedded in American pop-culture and was accepted almost universally by white Americans.

The Racialized Criminalization of Blackness in Post-Slavery America

Emancipation ended slavery in the United States, Jim Crow Laws would signify the formal institutionalization of racism, especially in the South. Slavery was gone, but the exploitative system of forced Black labor did not, the label of criminality soon came to replace the mark of the slave. The criminalization of blackness began with Slave and Black Codes. Slave Codes were instituted in the American south, while the later Black Codes were widespread throughout both the south and the north, and played a vital role in the rise of Jim Crow following the Civil War. These codified laws were meant to ensure Blacks remained uneducated, unorganized and subordinate to whites in every social setting. Black Codes (those directed at free Blacks) were first instituted in Louisiana prior to the Civil War as Louisiana had a large free Black, creole and mulatto population. Both Slave Codes and Black Codes were created to control the large slave and freedmen populations but would also work to maintain white rule by making trivial laws aimed at degrading and emphasizing blacks “inferior” role in society. David

³⁶Michael Rogin, ““The Sword Became a Flashing Vision”: D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*.” *Representations*, no. 9 (1985), 151. Also see Gay Null, *Black Hollywood: From 1910 to Today* (New York: Citadel Press, 1993), 17-21, for a discussion of the aesthetic and cinematix innovations of the film and their impacts on black society.

Oshinsky believes that “at the heart of these codes was the vagrancy and enticement laws, designed to drive ex-slaves back to their home plantations”.³⁷ Black Codes were fueled by white racialized stereotypes and prejudice. They were laws directed toward “the free negro alone” and attempted to criminalize such actions as: mischief, cruel treatment to animals, the vending of spirituous liquors, keeping a firearm, talking loud in the presence of a white women and/or intermarriage (the penalty for this was life imprisonment).³⁸ Probably the most widespread and harmful of these codes was the Vagrancy Act, this law “provided that ‘all free negroes and mulattoes over the age of eighteen’ must have written proof of a job at the beginning of every year.”³⁹ Blacks who did not have valid employment would be fined 50 dollars, and since they did not have steady work, they mostly could not pay the fine. Those who did not pay the fine, would have their debts sold off by the sheriff and/or town officials to the very same plantation owners who had held them in chains just a few years before.

in *Slavery By Another Name*, Douglas Blackmon described the convict leasing programs and labor contracts following emancipation as the re-enslavement of Black Americans. Blackmon describes how shortly after emancipation whites in the South sought to condition Blacks back into something as close to slavery as possible. He challenges the white assumption particularly in the post-Civil War southern U.S., that “slaves were unable to handle the emotional complexities of freedom and had been

³⁷ Oshinsky, *Worse Than Slavery*, 21.

³⁸ For an explanation of Black Codes see Oshinsky, *Worse than Slavery*, 20-21; Also see John C. Perry, *Myths & Realities of American Slavery*, 59-60 & 153-54; Slave and Black Codes differed according to each state, states with larger African American populations such as Louisiana or Georgia, usually had harsher codes.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

conditioned by generations of bondage to become thieves".⁴⁰ Blackmon also took to task his fellow historians for accepting the traditional view that slavery ended with emancipation.

The truth was that following the withdrawal of Union troops and institutions from the South, whites quickly sought to return to a system of Black labor exploitation that was eerily similar to slavery. Many Northerners, although supporters of emancipation, did not want to see Blacks compete with white workers and/or challenge the racial class system. Baptist summarizes this white supremacist ideology in *The Half Has Never Been Told*, he explains that although:

White Americans had gone to war with each other over the future of slavery, slavery lost... [and] Many whites celebrated emancipation as one of their collective triumphs. Yet whites' belief in emancipation made permanent by the Thirteenth Amendment was never that deep.... Within half a century the children of white Union and Confederate soldiers united against African American political and civil equality. This compact of white supremacy enabled southern whites to impose Jim Crow segregation on public space, disenfranchise African American citizens by barring them from the polls, and use the lynch-mob noose to enforce black compliance.⁴¹

The bitter truth for southern society was that without slaves and black free labor, their economy could not fully function. Baptist's overall argument in *The Half Has Never Been Told* is that American capitalism has been reliant on and was built upon American slavery. Most southern railroads, coal mines, iron forges, plantations and many other corporations and industries depended on free Black laborers to maintain production.

⁴⁰ Blackmon, *Slavery By Another Name*, 5.

⁴¹ Baptist, *Never Been Told*, xv-xvi.

Blackmon details the necessity of slave labor for the southern economy and industry, he explains how:

slaves were the primary workers at the earliest coal mines in Alabama, all of the early iron masters of the region relied on slaves... Alabama's first industrial fatality was a slave named Vann, killed by a falling rock in an iron ore pit, nearly all of the early industrial locations were constructed by slaves. [and] By the beginning of the civil war, railroads owned an estimated twenty thousand slaves.⁴²

Convict leasing would become the institutional form of racial oppression in the post-emancipation South, but lynching became the primary means of establishing white class solidarity, while reinforcing racial hierarchy and the white supremacist myths of Black inferiority. Ida B. Wells-Barnett writes in her book *On Lynchings; Southern Horrors* that "the whole matter is explained by the well known opposition to the progress of the race." Prior to the turn of the century Americans lynched an average of over a hundred Blacks in 1880, 71 in the 1890's and these averages continue to decrease into the 1900's.⁴³ Lynchings of African Americans included whole white communities, targeting African Americans for crimes they usually did not commit (rape was the most common charge, as the "purity" of whiteness was seen as challenged by interracial relations) and without trial, they would act as judge, jury and executioner killing countless black men. Covington not only identifies lynching as a strategy to control Black populations and maintain white domination by excluding Blacks from political and social life in America, but also as a way to solidify the white lower classes with white elites and maintain racial

⁴² Blackmon, *Slavery By Another Name*, 48

⁴³ Wells-Barnett, "On Lynchings," 13. Also see James R. McGovern, *Anatomy of a Lynching: The Killing of Claude Neal*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 2.

divisions.⁴⁴ In many senses this acted as a violent means to maintain white domination and racial solidarity, “as white elites and white laborers stood side by side to vent their racial hatred, lynchings were useful rituals for allowing poor whites to reflect on the psychological benefits of being white”.⁴⁵ Lynching, thus became a way for elites to maintain racial divisions in hard times and keep the lower classes from uniting against the ultimate oppressors of both Blacks and whites. Until the case of *Plessy vs Ferguson* in 1896, where the Supreme Court declared racial segregation the law of the land, lynchings, convict leasing and the criminalization of Black culture and people were the primary institutional and social forms of racial oppression.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Jeannette Covington, *Crime and Racial Constructions: Cultural Misinformation About African Americans in The Media and Academia*, (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010), 2-3. Also see McGovern, *Anatomy of a Lynching*, 4-5.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 4.

⁴⁶ *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896). Also see W.E.B. Dubois, “The Negro Criminal” and “Spawn of Slavery,” in *African American Classics in Criminology & Criminal Justice*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2002), for a discussion of the increased criminalization of Blacks in post-emancipation American cities, he details how this is not reflected of actual crime rates of this period.

Chapter 2

The Counter-subversion of the Black Power Movement and Civil Rights

In this section we will jump ahead to the Civil Rights Era of the 1960's, but it is important to point out that the years between the 1890's and World War II were important periods of American history. In 1896, the U.S. Supreme Court defended racial segregation in the case of *Plessy vs Ferguson* and legally enforced the "separate but equal" doctrine in America.⁴⁷ With the swoop of a pen white supremacism, discrimination and racial segregation all became legal and most cities strictly enforced these policies. Schools, public transportation, restaurants and most public facilities were segregated; one for whites (these were usually the best and most well funded), and one for Blacks (these were underfunded, neglected and marginalized). Collins explains how, "Southern states passed poll taxes, literacy tests, white primaries, and grandfather clauses to disenfranchise Blacks".⁴⁸ These racial segregation laws became known as "Jim Crow" laws, named after the song of a prominent blackface performer, and it would be these physical and racial barriers that Freedom Riders, boycotters, sit-inners and civil rights protests would challenge following the Second World War.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, there were several important events that should be discussed here. Race riots and lynchings were constants in American society at this time. It is interesting that prior to the Civil Rights era most race riots were committed by whites, against Blacks. Ann Collins describes the scene of the Tulsa Oklahoma riot of May 31, 1921, in which Dick Rowland a 19 year old Black shoeshine was detained over the attempted sexual assault of a white woman. She describes how:

⁴⁷ *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896). Also see Collins, *All Hell Broke Loose*, 15-6.

⁴⁸ Collins, *All Hell Broke Loose*, 15.

An angry crowd of white residents congregated in front of the courthouse..., and avowed that Rowland must pay with his life. The mob intended to lynch him. When a group of men from Tulsa's black community converged on the courthouse to protect Rowland..., A shot rang out and 'all hell broke loose,' when the violence stopped Tulsa's once thriving black community lay in ruins.⁴⁹

Collins relates how this event was indicative of how most race riots looked prior to 1960. White fear of Blacks having (interracial) sex with white women and the fear of enhanced Black Power from political rights drove most of these lynchings and riots.

Black progress in the years prior to the 1960's was hindered continuously by white violence, racialized stereotyped popular cultural images and racially instigated political rhetoric. The fact that Black Americans contributed to some of the greatest historical, cultural and societal innovations and acts, still did not fully allow them to be accepted within American society. The fact that Black troops, the now infamous Buffalo Soldiers or "Smoked Yankees" of the twenty-fourth infantry, fighting for the U.S. Army as they charged alongside Teddy Roosevelt's *Rough Riders*, greatly aided them in taking San Juan Hill in the Spanish-American War.⁵⁰ The fact that they fought in both World War I, II and the Vietnam War while dealing with racism, subordination and humiliation they defended America and gave their lives for its security. The fact that,

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, xv. Also see Allison Keyes, "A Long-Lost Manuscript Contains A Searing Eye Witness Account of the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921", *Smithsonian.com*, May 27, 2016 Accessed from <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/long-lost-manuscript-contains-searing-eyewitness-account-tulsa-race-massacre-180959251/>, for a first hand account of the riot written by John Hope Franklins father Buck Franklin as he describes the intentional arson and firebombings that decimated "Black Wall Street" effectively crippling the once vibrant Black population of Oklahoma. Also see Wells-Barnett, "On Lynchings," 4-5 & 21.

⁵⁰ Jerome Tuccille, *The Roughest Riders: The Untold Story of the Black Soldiers in the Spanish-American War* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2015), 1-5. Also see Alex Schexnider, "The Black Experience in the American Military" *Armed Forces and Society*, vol. 4 no. 2, (February, 1978), 329-334 and Bob Marley, "Buffalo Soldier", *Confrontation*, 1983.

Black culture has produced many of the greatest advancements in American popular culture. Jazz, bebop, blues, ragtime and dozens of other distinctly American musical genres were created by black artists. While white minstrel shows, early silent films, vaudeville and blackface all utilized the black image (albeit generally a perverted image), to sell their products. Blacks were both victims and contributors of the American experience, their images have been used to sell everything from music to maple syrup and their talents have brought forth some of the greatest American innovations.

These facts prove that blacks have greatly contributed to the advancements in American society from film and music to the battlefields of Cuba, Europe and Vietnam, they have proven their loyalties and indefatigable spirit time and again. Yet today racism is still prevalent, at the same time blacks were fighting America's enemies on the battlefield, they also marched for equality, civil rights and justice at home. White supremacists were fine with blacks fighting their enemies in war, but were not as willing to allow for blacks to fight for their own rights and freedoms at home. During World War I, James E. Westheider describes how America had "segregated units [for Blacks] that relegated them to menial labor, detailed to be haulers of ammunition, grave diggers, messmen and cooks," they generally performed construction tasks and dug trenches, but these were also two of the most dangerous jobs.⁵¹ His book, *fighting on two fronts*, describes the Black Civil Rights response to segregation and racism during World War II. This was also known as the Double V campaign, which stood for victory for civil rights at home and for the US Army in Europe. These campaigns continued following the war

⁵¹ James E. Westheider, *African Americans and the Vietnam War: Fighting on Two Fronts*, (New York: New York University Press, 1997) 1.

and these brave soldiers sparked the new generation of Blacks to fight for Civil Rights and full freedoms in American society.

The Civil Rights Movement stood as a direct challenge to racial hierarchy and white domination in American society and this inflamed white fears and incurred the wrath of state agencies hell bent on upholding white rule. In response to the Civil Rights Movement and the Great Migration of African Americans to cities, to avoid the intermingling of the races, many whites moved to all white communities and outright excluded blacks. In his book *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism*, author James Loewen breaks down just how pervasive these towns and counties were throughout the U.S. and interestingly enough these communities were rare in the South, but widespread in the North. These communities were dubbed “sundown towns,” for the fact that blacks were not allowed to be in these communities after dark (only during the day to work, usually as domestics) or they could suffer the vicious wrath of a white mob.

Loewen uses the twin towns Anna-Jonesboro in southern Illinois to demonstrate how sundown towns functioned and how they existed well into the 1960’s. Most posted signs along the highway and town limits with signs stating things such as “Whites Only,” “Nigger, Don’t Let The Sun Go Down” and/or “Ain’t No Niggers Allowed.” The town name of Anna, Illinois most likely came from the sign posted along Highway 127, that read: “Ain’t No Nigger Allowed (ANNA)”.⁵² Many towns had such signs as recently as the 1970s. These communities went by many different names and in many cases the

⁵² James Loewen, *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism*, (New York: The New Press, 2005), 3-4. Also see Andrea S. Boyles, *Race, Place and Suburban Policing: Too Close for Comfort*, University of Los Angeles: California Press, 2015), 24.

terms and overtness dissipated but not the belief in racial exclusion. Loewen articulates the fact that many suburbs began as sundown towns and that:

“These [towns] were also known as “sunset towns” or, in the Ozarks, “gray towns.” In the East, although many communities excluded African Americans, the term “sundown town” itself was rarely used. Residents of all-white suburbs also usually avoided the term, though not the policy.⁵³

Civil Rights and The Black Power Movements

In the 1960s the Civil Rights Movement would allow Black society to openly challenge the white supremacist narratives that have dominated American life for centuries. Martin Luther King jr. (MLK), Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, Huey Newton and many other Civil Rights and Black Power activists stood as symbols of Black liberation and revolution. The Civil Rights Movement was able to secure many successes such as gaining the black vote in 1965, yet again and again, white supremacist narratives would dominate white ideologies and thus would continue to rule American society. The Black Power and Civil Rights Movements became the target of brutal white supremacist attacks and white racist ideologies blinded politicians, police and the majority of white society in America from the root causes of the issues that would continue to pervade into the lives of Black Americans living in urban ‘slums’.

By the late 1960s the suppression of the Civil Rights Movement and growing Black resentment to racist policies led to increased protests, marches and riots. The latter of these came in fits of rage against increasing instances of police brutality, poor housing conditions and prolifically high rates of unemployment and underemployment.

⁵³ *Ibid.* Also see Boyles, *Race and Suburban Policing*, 24.

The rise of the Black Power Movement and the increased militarization within Black communities came as a way to protect against oppressive police forces. The FBI saw this as a grave threat to American society and would immediately set about infiltrating these Black Power groups and sought out methods to neutralize them. The Black Panther Party, Nation of Islam and several other groups advocating for Black rights and equality were targeted for suppression by means of sabotage, division and disinformation. Around the same time prominent Black Power leaders were being murdered, arrested and/or silenced, crack cocaine began flooding South Central LA..

This section argues that white racist views and policies kept Black Americans from fully participating in American society, the activism and movements that challenged this oppression was able to make some strides, but was ultimately neutralized, along with the Black Power Movement. The suppression of these groups coincided with the rush of drugs into urban ghettos, which, when also combined with the high unemployment rate, became an all too tempting career. In response to the problems of urban unrest in American ghettos the government and intelligence agencies would be blinded by racist assumptions and ignorance. Many federal policies would begin as good hearted attempts to eradicate such ills as poverty, crime and unemployment; yet instead of following the advice of the government reports to increase social services, jobs and improved housing, they ultimately chose to increase police, prisons and criminalize those who would attempt to challenge white racist narratives and policies.

Kerner Commission Conclusions and the Causes of Urban Unrest

In 1967, riots ravaged many American cities from Detroit and Chicago to Atlanta and Tampa. President Lyndon Baines Johnson would create a selected commission to investigate the causes of these so called riots which became known as the the Kerner Commission or the Riot Report. Johnson would appoint the progressive governor of Illinois, Otto Kerner, as the Chairman of the Commission and in many ways this report was to be representative of the view of the white moderate. The Kerner Commission surveyed white and black communities to discover the motivations and instigating factors of urban unrest.

In its official report released on February 29, 1969, the Commission put forth an ominous conclusion: “Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal.”⁵⁴ The commission explains what should be done to prevent this revelation from coming to fruition: attempt to reduce police brutality and white supremacist ideological domination of American society, while increasing social services and improving housing and employment conditions of urban communities. In accordance with conventional American liberalism, the Commission saw the problems of urban ghettos as fixable and urged more action from white American society to help reduce this growing social threat to American life:

Discrimination and segregation have long permeated much of American life; they now threaten the future of every American. This deepening racial division is not inevitable. The movement apart can be reversed. ... To pursue our present course will involve the continuing polarization of the American community and, ultimately, the destruction of basic democratic values. The alternative is not blind repression or capitulation to lawlessness. It is the realization of common opportunities

⁵⁴ *United States. Kerner Commission, Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1968), 1.

for all... This alternative will require a commitment to national action—compassionate, massive and sustained, backed by the resources of the most powerful and the richest nation on this earth.⁵⁵

As the commission would state, “From every American it will require new attitudes, new understanding, and, above all, new will... hard choices must be made, and, if necessary, new taxes enacted... Violence cannot build a better society.”⁵⁶ Above all a challenging of one’s own beliefs and those of your society needed to be achieved by everyone especially white Americans. A compassionate perspective was needed to open American eyes to the social problems of their society. What was necessary then, as well as today, is understanding and compassion, rather than blame and batons. Challenging white supremacist narratives and realizing the reasons for urban unrest, then addressing the causes and not the symptoms of these social problems is the only way to solve them. Also needed was an understanding of how these social ill’s came about and how they still impact American life as: “What white Americans have never fully understood—but what the Negro can never forget—is that white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it”.⁵⁷

White supremacist racial narratives since the time of slavery depicted African Americans as lazy, ultra-violent, over-sexualized criminal predators. By the mid 1960s these racial narratives came to dominate the mentality of white policymakers who may have been in many cases truly working to help minority groups, yet were ultimately blinded by racist assumptions. In 1965, sociologist and future member of congress

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 1-2.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 2.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*.

Daniel Moynihan authored a highly controversial study *The case for the Negro Family*, which concluded that it was unstable black families and black pathological tendencies that created the social conditions of urban ghettos.⁵⁸ Moynihan argues that a breakdown in Black family life that is creating a pathological culture of poverty and broken homes. He identifies in the section titled, “The Tangle of Pathology” that:

It was by destroying the Negro under Slavery that white America broke the will of the Negro people. Although that will has reasserted itself in our time, it is a resurgence doomed to frustration unless the viability of the Negro family is restored.⁵⁹

Thus, according to Moynihan, it was the “lack of viability of the Black family” and not white oppression, discrimination and prejudice that was hindering Blacks in the 1960s. Michelle Alexander explains the infamous Moynihan report as an attempt to attribute black poverty to a black ‘subculture’ and ‘tangle of pathology’ that characterized it”.⁶⁰ This would become the justification for conservative arguments that blacks themselves were responsible for their poverty not unemployment and racist social settings.

Alexander argues that both conservatives and liberal policy-makers had different responses, the formers views were more in line with Moynihan. They believed that it was aggressive “relief arrangements” (social assistance) from liberal policy-makers and blacks themselves who were responsible for the poor conditions of inner city ghettos as black “welfare cheats and their offspring milked the system”.⁶¹ Liberals such as

⁵⁸ Daniel P. Moynihan, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, (March, 1965), 5-8 & 30.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 30.

⁶⁰ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, (New York: The New Press, 2012): 45.

⁶¹ *Ibid*.

Johnson responded with attempts to fight the social conditions that fueled criminal behavior, such as the War on Poverty and civil rights legislation. They saw crime as being caused by poverty not pathology and took steps to eradicate it. The problem was that conservative racist narratives began to seep into the collective psyche of policymakers, undermining the liberal view in favor of Moynihan's position. As Alexander states, "Ultimately, the racialized nature of this imagery became a crucial resource for conservatives who [issued] law and order rhetoric... that mobilized white working-class voters, many of whom felt threatened by the progress of African Americans".⁶²

In the section of the report titled "Unemployment and Underemployment" the report details the impact of white economic racism and the lack of sufficient employment opportunities and/or conditions available to inner city African Americans. Although unemployment rates for out of work black males had declined since the "postwar high of 12.6 percent in 1958 to 8.2 percent in 1967," there were still over 700,000 black males without jobs and this was double the unemployment rate of white males.⁶³ Under closer examination, the prospects for inner city ghettos were much more grim than the statistics would lead us to believe. The Commission stated that, "incomes of persons living in the worst [inner city] slum areas have not risen during this period [late 1950s to late 60s], unemployment rates have slightly declined and... housing conditions have worsened even though rents have risen."⁶⁴ Upwards of two and a half million blacks, who the commission labels as "hard-core disadvantaged," reside within inner city slums.

⁶² *Ibid*, 46.

⁶³ Kerner Commission, 253

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 252.

Underemployment was seen as an even bigger problem than unemployment by the commission and they attribute racism and poor employment conditions for the Black community in American inner cities as they see poverty as a leading cause of urban unrest. They highlight the “decades of social, economic and psychological disadvantages surrounding the urban Negro poor [that] have impaired their work capacities and opportunities.”⁶⁵ White society kept Blacks in poor jobs with crappy wages and no chance for social mobility as non-white unskilled laborers were given the worst jobs available, if any at all. Many times they were forced to do jobs that no one wanted, as the Commission noted:

Negro workers are concentrated in the lowest-skilled and lowest paying occupations... [that] often involve substandard wages, great instability, extremely low status in the eyes of both employer and employee, little or no chance for meaningful advancement and unpleasant or exhausting duties... Negro men in particular as more than twice as likely as whites to be in unskilled or service jobs which pay far less than most.⁶⁶

Deindustrialization by the 70s only furthered the social ills ravaging urban inner city areas. Black workers were not the only ones affected by the loss of industry but they were hit the hardest by it. Prior to this many non-skilled workers could easily get jobs in factories across the country. By some estimates in the early 70s more than 70% of all black city workers had mid level blue-collar jobs, yet by 1987 the rate of employment of blacks in industrial jobs was 28%.⁶⁷ After the factories shut down large numbers of unskilled Black American workers were left without jobs and as social

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 252

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 253-4

⁶⁷ Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 50-51. Also see Jennifer L. Hochschild, *Facing Up to the American Dream*, (Princeton, N.J.:Princeton University Press, 1995), 45-7.

assistance ran out, they were left with little hope for the future. Michelle Alexander in her book *the New Jim Crow* describes the precarious position of Black Americans living in inner city ghettos in modern America. She relates how Black Americans in the “1970s lacked college educations and had attended racially segregated, underfunded schools lacking basic resources”.⁶⁸

Johnson under his Great Society campaign would implement many policies that sought at first to remedy the economic and social problems of urban minority communities. Many of these policies were initiated under President Kennedy, but were mostly minor programs that could not get sufficient funding to fully actuate these policies that looked to solve what Kennedy labeled the “delinquency problem”.⁶⁹ Elizabeth Hinten writes in her book *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*, that this “was developed with the best of intentions,” the problem was that “racism, hidden in explicit terms through the discourse of racial pathology, limited the committee’s ideas about the types of social welfare services possible.”⁷⁰ Instead the problem perceived by the Kennedy administration and that which would eventually come to be perceived by the Johnson administration as well, was that blacks themselves were responsible because of unstable Black families and a “self- perpetuating tangle of [cultural] pathology”.⁷¹

The policies that Kennedy would adopt and that Johnson would eventually come to implement under his infamous War on Crime strategy would increasingly shift the

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 50. Also see Hochschild, *Facing Up to the American Dream*, 40-51, for a breakdown of similar comparative statistics showing the differentiations between white and Black economic prospects.

⁶⁹ Elizabeth Hinten, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Makings of Mass Incarceration in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 48. Also see Eleanor, Chelimsky, "On the Social Science Contribution to Governmental Decision-Making," *Science* 254, no. 5029 (1991): 227-8.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 48. Also see James W. Button, *Black Violence: Political Impact of the 1960s Riots*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978), 46-49.

⁷¹ Moynihan, *The Negro Family*, 29-30.

blame onto Blacks and away from white society. If black were seen as natural criminals than the punitive and racist responses and policies of the state and police could be justified as maintaining 'law and order' in black urban communities. Hinten sees the Anti-delinquency policies of Kennedy as a direct precursor to the War on Crime and saw this ideological framework as responsible for "easing the transition to punitive federal programs that fully emerged during the Johnson administration".⁷² The riots that ravaged urban communities in the mid to late 60s only reinforced conservative views allowing policymakers to direct, "domestic programs at the plight of black men while removing themselves from accountability for the de facto restrictions, joblessness and racism that perpetuated poverty and inequality".⁷³

On July 11, 1966 Martin Luther King jr. in an attempt to quell the riots in Chicago met with Mayor Richard Daley and expressed his view that although promises were being made in the end these were only "surface changes and the problem is so gigantic in extent that it demanded structural changes... because the Negro community could no longer live with token changes".⁷⁴ King would never condone violence and strongly advocated for non-violent protest, sit-ins and boycotts as appropriate courses of action for the Black community and civil rights activists. He would also not apologize for the urban backlash to the poor conditions, lack of social services and brutal racist violence and discrimination from white supremacists and police that pervaded black urban society.

⁷² Hinten, *From the War on Poverty*, 49.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 60

⁷⁴ *CBS Special Report*, "Chicago Westside Riots," 1966.

Police Brutality and the Rise of the Black Power Movement

Uncle Sam never did a damn thing for me except lie about the facts in my history so now i'm sitting here mad cause i'm unemployed, but the governments glad cause they enjoy, when my people are down so they can screw us around, it's time to change the government now, Panther Power.

- Tupac Shakur, *Panther Power* (Released posthumously in 2000 on *Tupac: Resurrection*).

The Black Power Movement can be seen as a direct reaction to police brutality from white police officers, the conditions that white racism fosters in the ghetto created the tinderbox for which police brutality was generally the spark. Jeanette Covington in her book *Crime and Racial Construction*, explains how the violence and racial imagery directed at the black community is intricately connected with attempts to maintain the racial hierarchies in America and preserve white supremacy. She states that “to maintain white supremacy and to justify white domination, they often constructed [an image of] blackness that justifies black exclusion and exploitation”.⁷⁵ The best way to achieve this goal is to represent blacks as dangerous and criminals, which was achieved through a saturation of dangerous black criminal imagery within the media, politics and popular culture of American society.⁷⁶

Police brutality became an institutional arm for this same white supremacist rhetoric and ideology, as modern police forces have taken over the role of maintaining white

⁷⁵ Jeanette Covington, *Crime and Racial Constructions: Cultural Misinformation About African Americans in The Media and Academia*, (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010): 2.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* Also see Muhammad, *Condemnation of Blackness*, 276-7 and Dubois, “Spawn of Slavery”.

domination over blacks within the racial hierarchy in America today. Civil Rights protests, sit-ins, freedom rides, boycotts and marches were all met with blind repression and were resisted by a reactionary white supremacist ideology, that would use any and all means whether that be political, institutional or simple brutal physical violence to secure white rule in both the cities and government of American society. The brutal suppression of the Civil Rights Movement mainly in the American South was shown on televisions across the country and would draw support from both lower and middle class whites along with northern Black Americans towards the movement.

Lower and middle class whites began to unite with minority groups in the mid 1960's and by 1970, government responses to white antiwar protesters shattered almost all faith in the government, police and American justice system. As lower and middle class whites began to feel the brunt of the police methods of dealing with activists they would begin to become seriously disillusioned with their government. Jeanette Covington believes that Black Americans in the North increasingly began to:

“adopt black power ideology which rejected integration... and Instead of joining interracial organizations, many northern blacks began to talk in terms of bringing about racial change on their own in all-black organizations. Racial change in the north increasingly came to be equated with ridding blacks of police bigotry and brutality”.⁷⁷

Much of the support for Johnson's Great Society programs that sought to eradicate poverty and the social ills of the inner city ghettos of America came from these lower and middle class whites. Republicans would sow economic and racial divisions by blaming the affirmative action and expanded social and welfare programs for appeasing Blacks at the expense of white workers. The Republicans, “went out of their way to

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

demonstrate their willingness to defend disgruntled white voters” and attacked the Democrats for being “too beholden to black civil rights organizations”.⁷⁸ The reactionary republican cry for a reestablishment of white domination and for an elimination of the social and economic programs would become a rallying call for republicans and white supremacists. This meant that once the Republicans got into office these:

programs (which provided a safety net for the poor of all races) would be gutted, constitutional protections for black voting rights reversed, school busing that promoted racially integrated schools would have to end along with affirmative action programs that increased opportunities for black class mobility.⁷⁹

These racial and economic divisions would allow the Republicans to dominate American political life for the next 50 years, using the same racialized imaginary and ideologies that white supremacists had used to justify slavery and Jim Crow.

By the late 1960s as Nixon promoted “law and order” over compassion, the Civil Rights Movement would be completely suppressed. The Black Power Movement grew out of the ashes of the Civil Rights Movement and realized that a new strategy was necessary one that was a little less non-violent and a little more pro-black. The earliest and most prominent organizations to fully begin to push for Black Power were the Nation of Islam (NOI) under Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X and the Black Panther Party (BPP) under Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale. More will be said about both of these groups later, but for now it is good to understand that these groups acted as protectors of black society, their culture and people. The 12 point program of the BPP

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 9. Also see Button, *Black Violence*, 46-7 & 145-55.

⁷⁹ *Ibid* 9-10. Also see Button, *Black Violence*, 150-56.

reads like a list of Kerner Commission recommendations, as better schools, jobs, housing, social services and an end to racist police oppression are its main goals.⁸⁰

The BPP was created in Oakland, California in 1966 by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, but quickly spread with chapters opening up in almost every major American city. The party stood for the armed self defense of the Black community and social revolution, eventually they would proclaim their alliance with the oppressed people all over the world. They read revolutionary literature from Frantz Fanon to Mao Tse-tung and incorporated many of these principles and rhetoric into their own revolutionary vernacular. The BPP would develop breakfast and after school programs to keep kids off the streets and promoted black culture and businesses, they patrolled the streets of black communities to ensure police did not brutalize their people and encouraged literacy and education. In 1967 the BPP gained international media attention when Seale burst into the California state capitol building with a group Panthers armed with rifles and shotguns, this scene is reenacted in the film *Panther* by Melvin van Peebles.

To understand how this movement went from the Civil Rights to Black Power is to realize that as Lisa Corrigan in her book *Prison Power* explains:

“the repression of political dissent with violence spawns resistance; certainly black activists understood this dynamic in a visceral way since thousands have been imprisoned for working against segregation and for political representation. Particularly within the leadership of SNCC, the conversation changed from voter registration to more radical tactics, as activists grew more frustrated with the constant harassment and violence initiated by state agencies”⁸¹

⁸⁰Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seal, “Black Panther Party for Self Defence 10 Point Program,” Accessed on April 1, 2018 from http://www.pbs.org/hueypnewton/actions/actions_platform.html.

⁸¹ Lisa M. Corrigan, *Prison Power: How Prison Influenced the Movement for Black Liberation*, (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2016): 22-23. Also see Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle For Black Equality* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 164 & 170-3 for a more in depth discussion of the radicalization of SNCC..

SNCC or the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee was a Civil Rights organization that brought together activists and supporters to organize rallies, protests and many other forms of activism. SNCC would become internally divided along racial and class lines by the late 1960s and many former leaders such as Stokely Carmichael would go on to lead Black Power organizations.

In response to the BPP and other Black Power organizations the FBI began to issue orders to neutralize and subvert these groups by dividing and vilifying them. Just as they had done to Civil Rights leaders they would initiate campaigns to smear their names and vilify their character as subversive, dangerous and criminal. The growth of the BPP and Black Power along with increasingly united black organizations and communities would spread fear into the hearts of intelligence and government reactionaries. By 1968 the BPP in Oakland would centralize power and introduce universal principles and chapter charters that sought to discourage “unauthorized expansion” and unite the party under one centralized party structure.⁸² At this same time the BPP became labeled as the greatest threat to American society by the head of the FBI, J Edgar Hoover. The label of “rabble-rouser” and “outside agitator” began to cement itself into the minds of anti-communists and conservatives alike, who began to accept these fictitious accounts as fact.⁸³ In a FBI Memorandum, “Hoover warned of a ‘black messiah’... that [would] fully challenge white supremacy” and that “MLK,

⁸² University of Washington, “Mapping the Black Panther Party in Key Cities,” *Mapping American Social Movements Through the 20th Century*, Retrieved March 22, 2018 from http://depts.washington.edu/moves/BPP_map-cities.shtml.

⁸³ Corrigan, *Prison Power*, 22.

Carmichael and Elijah Muhammad all aspire to this role”.⁸⁴ Black Power activists stood against an unequal and unjust system and were labeled as troublemakers and criminals for doing so, “allowing conservatives to paint them as perennial dangers to law and order, leading to mass incarceration as the Black Power movement rose and fell”.⁸⁵

The Black Power movement needs to be seen as a reaction against white supremacist racism that pervaded police and policy maker decisions and led to increasing instances of police brutality and in response, urban riots. Huey Newton in a television interview given from a California prison illustrated the glaring problem of police violence in urban minority communities. He describes the police as “foreign occupying troops” and that the police are “not there to promote our welfare and our security, but are there to contain us, to brutalize and murder us because they have their orders to do so”.⁸⁶ The division and destruction of the BPP and Black Power movement is the direct result of flawed government policies and FBI efforts to demonize and eliminate the movement, its goals and the leaders that promoted these ends.

COINTELPRO AND THE COUNTER-SUBVERSION OF BLACK POWER

“Never gave me nothing but slavery, look at how dangerous you made me. Calling me a madman cause i’m strong and bold with this gun full of knowledge of the lies you told... Couldn’t survive in this capitalistic government cause it was meant to hold us back using ignorance, drugs and sneak attacks, In my community they kill the unity and when i charged them they try to claim immunity. ”

- Tupac Shakur, *Panther Power* (Released posthumously in 2000 on *Tupac: Resurrection*).

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Huey Newton Interview from Jail, 1968, Accessed on March 28, 2018 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s5J71VnorTY>.

Police, Prisons and FBI programs created to divide, subvert and neutralize Black Power organizations were the primary tools used by the state in the counter-subversion of the Black Power Movement. FBI programs, government policing and social policies were overshadowed by racist assumptions and attitudes that were siphoned through to local Police and pervaded throughout American society. The Black Power Movement was reacting against the white racism that oppressed and excluded them, whereas the reaction by the state was nothing short of blind repression.

In 1967, FBI Counterintelligence Operation Programs (COINTELPRO) began to be directed towards early Black Power organizations that were seen as disturbing the peace and challenging the status quo of American society. COINTELPRO initially was a countersubversive operation that gained much support in Cold War American society and was at first a full out FBI attack on communism and communist infiltration into American society. By 1967 COINTELPRO targeted the Black Power organization Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) led by Maxwell Sanford. At first the FBI would establish connections with local police and set up surveillance units to discover the organization's structure and leaders.⁸⁷ Then they would arrest members for any and all crimes even locking people up for alleged needle marks, graffiti and/or disturbing the peace. Many faced trumped up charges and were jailed again and again until they could no longer afford bail and could no longer work effectively within these organizations.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ FBI COINTELPRO Memorandum on Black Nationalist - Hate Groups to SAC Philadelphia, August 30, 1967.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

The COINTELPRO operations against RAM were so successful that the FBI would use them as a blueprint for future COINTELPRO operations against Black Power Groups. In FBI Memorandums they explain how “some of the steps taken against RAM may be of possible use elsewhere... [and that local] police units may have to ‘play it by ear,’ which may reduce Bureau control.”⁸⁹ Most operations would thus be carried out by Intelligence and/or Civil Disobedience Units (CDU), in the case of RAM it was the Philadelphia Police Department (PD), but was authorized and run by FBI agents. Local PD became the keepers of ‘law and order’ on the street and carried out the dirty work of FBI COINTELPRO operations.

Many of the FBI documents on Black Extremist groups such as the NOI show detailed accounts of their activities, personnel and ideologies which would usually be collected by local police. The FBI utilizes this data to then find ways to neutralize and subvert these groups, with the NOI they would do so with media and misinformation campaigns designed to eliminate their popular support. A February 9, 1968 FBI Memo indicates the FBI suggestions for interview questions that would intentional embarrass and discredit the NOI leaders. These included: “insinuating that Malcolm X was being targeted for assassination by NOI members, that the beating and murder of [NOI member] Leon Phillips was caused by the NOI, exposing them as white haters and claiming that Elijah Muhammad was sleeping with his secretaries”.⁹⁰ Agents were given the authority to spread slanderous content throughout the media as the orders in this FBI memo from February of 1969 explain, “You are authorized to furnish derogatory

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ FBI COINTELPRO Memorandum on Black Nationalist - Hate Groups to SAC Boston, February 9, 1968.

information on the Nation of Islam (NOI) to the radio station WEAN in Rhode Island.”⁹¹ A letter from G.C. Moore to William Sullivan explains the successful results of this operation which “showed that NOI leaders are of questionable character and live in luxury through money taken as contributions” and that “attendance at weekly NOI meetings has dropped 50%... [which] shows the value” of COINTELPRO.⁹²

Malcolm X split from the NOI in 1964 and attempted to establish a black nationalist movement that could reach above religious divisions and reach all blacks. He was assassinated by alleged NOI members in February of 1965 after the FBI propaganda and disinformation campaigns created divisions within the NOI and created a culture of division and hate within NOI leadership and members. FBI memos describe how a legitimate black power religious organization could be effective at uniting with the American Civil Rights Movement and that this presents “dangerous potential”. Hoover sent a very blunt memo on June 5, 1964 pressing agents at the bureau to “Do something about Malcolm X enough of this black violence in NY.”⁹³ Although this happened prior to the huge FBI COINTELPRO directed against BPP, the same tactics and the same ideological frameworks were at play. For instance, one FBI memo details the suggestions of posting pictures of Muhammed Ali and MLK posing together and “because of past conflict between NOI and MLK, Baltimore is requested to consider alerting a newspaper source to this” and that “an apparent alliance between King and the NOI, a militant, black nationalist group, might prove embarrassing to King”.⁹⁴ The

⁹¹ FBI COINTELPRO Memorandum on Black Nationalist - Hate Groups to SAC Boston, February 27, 1968.

⁹² Memorandum from G.C. Moore to William C. Sullivan October 21, 1969.

⁹³ Memorandum from J. Edgar Hoover, June 5, 1964.

⁹⁴ FBI COINTELPRO Memorandum on Black Nationalist - Hate Groups to SACs Atlanta, Baltimore and Chicago, March 14, 1968.

FBI even details that the reports should not be publicized in black newspapers as “of course this will only publicize to King’s advantage.”⁹⁵

The FBI would not be the only intelligence agency to be involved in monitoring Black Power groups, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) has also been implicated both directly and indirectly in these campaigns. The way that the CIA was directly linked with being involved in domestic politics was in 1964 under Program CHAOS established in response to government pressure to uncover foreign influences into Black Power and Civil Rights groups.⁹⁶ Government staff reports detail how, “the CHAOS mission was to gather and evaluate all available information about foreign links to racial, antiwar and other protest activity in the United States”.⁹⁷ The overall initial conclusion was that no foreign elements were involved in these activist groups, yet this was not accepted by the Johnson and Nixon administrations who pushed for further investigation. Pressing the CIA further into domestic spying and intelligence gathering, although most of this was done by the FBI some CIA agents infiltrated into these groups.

The purpose for this CIA infiltration into domestic activist groups other than simply gathering intel was to “develop ‘radical’ credentials as cover for overseas assignment.”⁹⁸ CHAOS would also gather counterintelligence “from the CIA mail opening project and from a National Security Agency international communications

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Supplementary Detailed Staff Reports On Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans; Book III, Final Report of the Select Committee to Study Governmental Organizations with Respect to Intelligence Activities*, United States Senate: “CIA Intelligence Collection About Americans: Chaos and the Office of Security,” April 23, 1976: 681.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 682.

intercept program.”⁹⁹ Project MERRIMAC and RESISTANCE were both CIA programs created to protect CIA installations and assets from domestic sabotage by political, racial and/or anti-war protest groups. MERRIMAC was directed at Black Power groups in Washington, CIA agents infiltrated these groups to obtain intel about threats to the the US government and CIA. These programs expanded “to include general information about the leadership, funding and activities and policies of the targeted groups.”¹⁰⁰

The major agency tasked with neutralizing Black Power in America was the FBI, in the book *Agents of Repression*, authors Churchill and Vander Wall list the various methods utilized by the FBI to neutralize Black Power organizations. Eavesdropping, bogus mail, harassment arrests, ‘Black and Gray Propaganda,’ bad-jacketing, ‘pseudo-gangs,’ infiltrators or agent provocateurs and assassinations became the modus operandi for COINTELPRO directed against the Black Power Movement.¹⁰¹ FBI attempts at discrediting and neutralizing Black Power leaders were very much the same as those used against MLK jr. Continuous letters, threats and smear campaigns were all directed at King by the FBI in the hope of either discrediting him, pushing him out of his role as a civil rights and religious leader and/or forcing King to commit suicide.¹⁰² FBI agent ‘Deke’ Deloach a prominent figure in COINTELPRO had initiated smear campaigns to paint King as a ‘sex pervert.’¹⁰³ The major goal of COINTELPRO directed against Black Power groups as stated in their own memos is:

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression: The FBI Secret Wars Against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement*, (Cambridge, South End Press, 2002):37-62.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 56-57.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 56.

“To expose, disrupt, discredit or otherwise neutralize the activities of black nationalist, hate-type organizations and groupings, their leadership, spokesmen, membership and supporters... efforts to consolidate their forces or to recruit new or youthful adherents must be frustrated. No opportunity should be missed to exploit the organizational and personal conflicts of the leadership of the groups and an effort should be made to capitalize upon existing conflicts between competing black nationalist organizations... through the cooperation of established local news media contacts and through such contact with sources available to the Seat of Government, in every instance careful attention must be to the proposal to insure the targeted group is disrupted, ridiculed or discredited through the publicity and not merely publicized... [and] to preclude violence-prone and rabble-rouser leaders of hate groups from spreading their philosophy publicly or through various mass communication media.”¹⁰⁴

Bogus mail campaigns would include writing letters to various Black Power leaders and members attempting to accuse other Black groups of planning hits, takeovers and/or undermining them. These were primarily used to sow divisions, to create paranoia and to subvert the power of these organizations. An FBI Memorandum dated April 4, 1968 details FBI agents proposed writing of a letter to H.Rap Brown that would sow divisions in the BPP following his release from prison.¹⁰⁵ In a response from the Special Agent in Charge (SAC), the FBI agreed a letter should be sent to Brown but instead of claiming the BPP were attempting to eliminate him, they believed that blaming Stokely Carmichael for getting him arrested in an attempt to gain control over SNCC would be a better option.¹⁰⁶ FBI agents discuss in their memos the orders for obtaining BPP stationary letters and templates so that letters could be drafted by the

¹⁰⁴ FBI Memorandum on Black Nationalist - Hate Groups to SAC Albany, August 25, 1967

¹⁰⁵ FBI Memorandum on Black Nationalist - Hate Groups to SAC New York, April 4, 1968.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

FBI then sent back to agent infiltrators who would then mail or deliver the letters.¹⁰⁷ In a memo to the SAC in the San Francisco office, FBI orders “involved the mailing of expulsion letters to approximately sixty members of the BPP as a disruptive measure.”¹⁰⁸

Black Propaganda was FBI media and disinformation operations that would disseminate leaflets and other such material posing as Black Power groups and spreading misinformation attempting to discredit the group. The term ‘gray’ propaganda is very similar, but instead of being directed towards other Black Power groups these misinformation operations would be directed at the American public through media reports, interviews, newspapers and popular culture. One of the most successful Black Propaganda operations was the publication of several blatantly hostile cartoons that were meant to make it seem as if the leader of the United Slave Organization (US) Ron Karenga and BPP leaders were threatening each other.¹⁰⁹ These cartoons, misinformation campaigns and agent provocateurs (police or FBI infiltrators) would effectively create a ‘shooting war’ between US and the BPP in LA.¹¹⁰ This led to the murders of John Huggins and ‘Bunchy’ Carter, two LABPP leaders killed by US members whom Churchill and Vander Wall believe may have been police infiltrators “injected to raise the level of tensions between US and BPP.”¹¹¹ These propaganda campaigns were increasingly effective at creating divisions within the BPP.

¹⁰⁷ FBI Memorandum on Black Nationalist - Hate Groups to SAC San Francisco, December 16, 1969.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Churchill and Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression*, 43.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

The BPP was not an important target at first by the FBI and it would not be until late 1968 that the full brunt of the agency would be directed at the BPP. The BPP by 1968 was becoming more successful with their social services and political revolutionary rhetoric attracting thousands of new members by the late 60's. They were openly challenging the racial hierarchy and white domination of black communities which prompted heavy handed reactions from the FBI. By November, 1968 FBI memos directed agents to come up with "imaginative and hard-hitting counterintelligence measures aimed at crippling the BPP."¹¹² Agents were given orders to focus on sowing divisions with the BPP and other Black Power groups particularly the US organization which began to take on "the aura of gang warfare".¹¹³

The FBI would also implement campaigns to split the BPP and would lead to purges by the party leaders Seale and Newton attempting to rid the organization of police infiltrators. In march of 1970 the FBI initiated an operation that successfully orchestrated the split between Newton and Eldridge Cleaver who was the Minister of Information for the BPP. Cleaver had gone on a trip to Algiers and the FBI sent bogus mail to Cleaver making it seem as if the BPP leaders wanted to undermine his role in the party and push him out. The Church Committee explains how the FBI made the letters appear as if they were from Panthers in Europe and then sent letters to Newton claiming that David Hilliard and Cleaver were looking to take over the leadership of the BPP.¹¹⁴ The report then details continued FBI attempts through constant letters to Cleaver claiming that Newton was not providing "BPP press coverage for Cleaver's role

¹¹² FBI Memorandum on Black Nationalist - Hate Groups to SAC Baltimore, November 25, 1968.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Supplementary Detailed Staff Reports On Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans; Book III, Final Report of the Select Committee to Study Governmental Organizations with Respect to Intelligence Activities*, United States Senate: "FBI Covert Action Program to Destroy the BPP," April 23, 1976: 198-9.

in North Vietnam and Korea”.¹¹⁵ Letters the FBI sent to Newton would blame Cleaver for “divorcing the BPP from white revolutionaries” and claim that numerous Panthers were informers, liars and/or potential usurpers attempting to undermine BPP leadership.¹¹⁶

The FBI looked for and sought to utilize all avenues from which they could create dissension within the BPP and further tensions between all affiliated black groups. A good example of this type of FBI COINTELPRO was the exploitation of an unsuccessful merger between the Chicago BPP and the Blackstone Rangers (another black power group in Chicago that the FBI noted was very well armed). A letter from a “concerned black citizen” was drafted by the FBI that accused the BPP of breaking the truce between the groups and that they were attempting to take over Blackstone territory and putting out hits on its leaders.¹¹⁷ Chicago field office memos from January of 1969 detail the FBI plan which was to “intensify the degree of animosity between the two groups and occasion Fort (the leader of the Blackstone Rangers) to take retaliatory action which could disrupt the BPP or lead to reprisals.”¹¹⁸ Steps were also taken to foster rivalries with the Chicago Mau Mau youth gang who could be used to discredit the BPP international reputation. This would make the BPP seem like a self-centred organization as supposedly “the only black people they cared about was themselves.”¹¹⁹

The FBI sought to destroy the reputation of these groups by forcing them into armed conflicts, creating divisions and assassinating the character of the targeted group. The NOI and MLK would be attacked with sexual propaganda by labeling the

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, 199.

¹¹⁶ Memorandum from FBI Headquarters to San Francisco and New York Field Offices, 2/5/71.

¹¹⁷ Memorandum from Chicago Field Office to FBI Headquarters, 1/13/69.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*.

¹¹⁹ Memorandum from FBI Headquarters to Chicago Field Office, 1/30/69.

leading figures of these movements as perverts and as supposedly taking advantage of those whom they were supposed to be leading. Sexual disinformation was also used against the BPP as the FBI would either fabricate or obtain photos purportedly “showing [male BPP members] having affairs with teen girls” and show these to their wives.¹²⁰ However, BPP members and supporters would mainly be attacked for their socialist programs, revolutionary rhetoric and for the success of their Black Power organization. By 1970 the FBI would direct operations against the free breakfast programs by writing letters to landlords warning that the BPP “takes over communities it resides in and drives down property values.”¹²¹ This led to evictions of BPP supporters from their homes due to their allowing of breakfast programs to take place in their residences.

Many supporters of the BPP faced persecution and were targeted for neutralization, including university professors Angela Davis and Bruce Franklin. Angela Davis and Bruce Franklin were both dismissed from their jobs and faced trumped up charges that sought to eliminate their influences and silence their protests for the release of Black Power leaders such as George Jackson. Franklin and his Venceremos organization were accused of aiding a prisoner escape from a California prison. Franklin and his organization were cleared of all accusations but the damage was already done as Venceremos all but fell apart by the time the trial ended.¹²² Davis would suffer a similar fate and after being dismissed from UCLA for supposed communist and BPP party affiliations, she continued to fight for change. After a shootout outside the Marin County Courthouse, where BPP members took hostages and demanded safe passage

¹²⁰ Memorandum from San Francisco Field Office to FBI Headquarters, 11/26/68.

¹²¹ Memorandum from San Francisco Field Office to FBI Headquarters, 10/22/70.

¹²² Churchill and Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression*, 96.

but were all killed by police as they exited the courthouse, Davis was charged with murder even though she was in San Jose at the time.¹²³ The police attempted to claim she was involved because an occasional bodyguard had used a gun registered in her name. She would be eventually acquitted but this seriously strained the finances of her organization (Soledad Brothers Defence Committee).

Snitch-Jacketing or Bad-Jacketing became one of the most successful methods for disrupting and neutralizing the Black Power Movement. Snitch-jacketing was the practice of spreading rumors or bogus mail/news reports that accused certain BPP members of being police informers and/or agent provocateurs (snitches). An FBI memo from September of 1968 explains how the FBI can use snitch-jacketing as a way to neutralize Stokely Carmichael. The memo states that “to convey the impression that Carmichael is a CIA informer,” fake CIA reports were to be drafted and made to seem like they were written by Carmichael.¹²⁴ These reports would then be clandestinely placed in “the automobile of a close Black Nationalist friend, so [it is easily] seen,” and rumors were spread to “criminal and racial informants that [he] is a CIA agent”.¹²⁵

The Church Committee declared in 1975 that the FBI had been placing anonymous calls to BPP offices and members in 1968, “naming other BPP members as ‘police agents’”.¹²⁶ The FBI would then again spread these rumors through their police infiltrators within the BPP. As noted in FBI reports, these operations caused three Panthers to be accused of being police agents and this created so much suspicion

¹²³ See Howard Moore jr’s., “Angela: Symbol of Resistance” in Davis, Angela Y. et al., *If They Come in the Morning*, (New York: Signet Books, 1971), 203-12 for this story and subsequent trial.

¹²⁴ Memorandum from New York Field Office to FBI Headquarters, 7/10/68.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ Church Committee, “FBI Program to Destroy BPP,” 194-6.

within the party that the accused members fled San Diego.¹²⁷ Churchill and Vander Wall believe that the FBI bad-jacketing of Jimmy Carr and Fred Bennett, two prominent Bay Area BPP members, led to their executions. They explain that Carr was shot on his front porch by BPP members “who both claimed that Carr was a police agent”.¹²⁸ The FBI not only considered labeling individuals as snitches, but considered labelling the entire BPP and SNCC as “front groups established by police agencies,” but was rejected as it might “unite these groups against the intelligence agency that distributed this document.”¹²⁹

The final and most lethal of all methods of counter-subversion used against the BPP was outright physical murder. As the reader should already deduce, police agents infiltrating Black Power organizations were very successful at causing divisions and in many cases set the stage for violent clashes between and within these groups. Although many assassinations carried out against the BPP were indirectly caused by FBI programs, there were several cases where the FBI can be seen directly orchestrating local police to carry out repressive actions that can include murder. The case of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark provides a conclusive understanding of this reality. In a 1974 *New York Times* article, the FBI admitted, in a “multi-million dollar Civil lawsuit... filed on behalf of the mothers of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark... that detailed floor plans were provided” to the Chicago PD by FBI informants prior to the raid that ended in the killing of the BPP leaders.¹³⁰ The floor plan clearly marked to show where Hampton slept was drawn up over lunch by FBI informant William O'Neal, who was

¹²⁷ Memorandum from San Diego Field Office to FBI Headquarters, 3/12/69.

¹²⁸ Churchill and Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression*, 49-51.

¹²⁹ Memorandum on Black Nationalist - Hate Groups to SAC New York, 8/7/68.

¹³⁰ John Kifner, “FBI Before Raid, Gave Police Plan of Chicago Panther’s Flat,” *New York Times*, May 25, 1974. Also see Churchill and Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression*, 67.

Head of Security for the Chicago BPP. FBI files do not openly state they ordered local police to murder Fred Hampton, yet in a memo dated for December 3 the day before the raid they do discuss their role in “furnishing information” to bring “Chicago BPP members on local charges”.¹³¹ The FBI alerted local police to act upon supposed “illegal weapons purchased by BPP members,” Chicago PD advised they will take a positive course of action relative to this information”.¹³² The raid that resulted in the murders of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark were carried out on illegal weapons suspicions.

The rise of drugs in inner city black communities by the 1970's devastated the unity of the Black Power Movement and the organizations that supported it. In the book *Dark Alliance*, author/journalist Gary Webb provides extensive and well researched accounts of CIA operations that indirectly were responsible for allowing thousands of kilos of cocaine to flood the streets of inner city urban ghettos. Webb concludes that the CIA ignored Contra supporters selling of cocaine in South Central Los Angeles, in order to help support the Somoza government (Contras) overthrow the Communist Sandinistas in Nicaragua.¹³³ Rick Ross became the largest crack dealer in the US with cocaine provided to him by Danilo Blandon who, Webb discovered through Department of Justice documents and court files, was an informant for the DEA.¹³⁴ Webb put forth a damning observation, one that “exemplifies the hypocrisy of the whole War of Drugs...

¹³¹ Memorandum from Chicago Field Office to FBI Headquarters, 12/3/69.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ Gary Webb, *Dark Alliance: The CIA, the Contras and the Crack Cocaine Explosion*, New York: Seven Stories Press, 1998. Also see Alexander, *New Jim Crow*, 6.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, 430-2

The crack dealers (Ross) went to prison while the men who made crack possible--cocaine importers (Blandon)--walked".¹³⁵

Deindustrialization and drugs became a deadly combination that proved to only worsen the conditions that the Kerner Commission noted. Many BPP autobiographies and testaments see drugs as a primary factor in bringing about the ultimate demise of the group, but not all are willing to lay the blame entirely on the government and intelligence agencies. Former BPP Chief of Staff David Hilliard writes in his autobiography that drugs caused Newton to transform the BPP into just another street gang and led to a complete collapse of unity and integrity, he reflects how this is not only happening within the BPP but all throughout the black community.¹³⁶ Hilliard describes how "the fights we used to have are now deadly affairs" and in a microcosmic way relates his own fall into the depths of such depravities as, "liquor starts my self destruction, cocaine guarantees it".¹³⁷ Newton was killed in a suspected drug related killing in 1989, Hilliard does not blame Huey fully for his role in bringing about the end of the BPP and sees "Hueys chemical dependency [as representative] of all our weaknesses in America".¹³⁸ The government's War on Drugs again only worked to reinforce conservative racialized biases and ensured increasing punitive responses to the worsening conditions of the inner cities. By the late 70's, following the suppression of the Black Power Movement, the lure of fast cash from drugs became a way out of the cycle of poverty that was the reality for millions of Blacks in inner cities throughout

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, 437.

¹³⁶ David Hilliard and Lewis Cole, *This side of Glory: the Autobiography of David Hilliard and the Story of the Black Panther Party*, (Little, Brown and Company: Boston), 405-6.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, 406.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, 436.

America, this would be a significant cause of the gangs and crime that plague urban ghettos today. Alexander believes that the lack of helplessness and meaningful employment in urban communities, “increased incentives to sell drugs - most notably crack cocaine”.¹³⁹ The death of Black Power was the loss of unity in Black urban settings, allowing drugs and gangs to become the defacto overlords of American ghettos. The opening narration of the film *Original Gangstas* (1996) sums up this harsh reality:

Your looking at Gary Indiana, USA. A city with the highest murder rate in America maybe the world. A factory town that somehow became a gang town. Back in the 50's the community was supported by the US Steel Mill, it was damn hard work but people raised their families well. Then just 20 years later without warning US Steel shut down 70% of the mill, at first the workers thought it was temporary, but it wasn't. Their savings went, unemployment ran out, and slowly the former steel workers lost the last two things they had left, their pride and they hope.¹⁴⁰

Conclusion

As this section has shown, the Black Power Movement of the late 1960's came as a response to white supremacism and racist policies that permeated American society. The movement was greatly successful at organizing, unifying and stimulating the Black community to band together and attempt to create their own social services, along with community watch programs to monitor and prevent instances of police brutality. The Kerner Commission laid out the real instigating factors for riots and Black urban unrest which they believed stemmed from white racism. The Johnson

¹³⁹ *New Jim Crow*, 51.

¹⁴⁰ Opening Narration from the film: Larry Cohen, *Original Gangstas*, Po' Boy Productions, 1996.

administration through his War on Poverty would attempt to actually fix these problems and did some good. By 1968 Nixon came to power riding a conservative backlash against Johnson's policies that led to a punitive campaign directed at forcefully controlling the ghetto instead of providing the jobs, schools and social services they desperately needed.

US Intelligence Agencies took steps to monitor, subvert and neutralize Black Power groups. The methods described above utilized by the FBI to neutralize Black Power groups, all sought to create divisions and sow suspicions within these groups. By 1970 the FBI had successfully splintered the BPP, NOI, RAM, SNCC and numerous other Black Power groups leading to disunity in the black community. Drugs and gangs took over the streets of urban minority communities as deindustrialization left people jobless and hopeless. The government instead of providing the necessary improvements to urban ghettos, they ignored them, lied to them and enacted punitive measures to control them. When the oppressed organized, unified and rose up to challenge white domination of American society, they were systematically subverted, disunified, neutralized and eliminated. White racist ideological frameworks pervaded conservative policy makers, police and the FBI whom all worked to ensure that Black Power would never successfully allow Blacks full participation in American society.

Chapter 3

The Effects of Racialized Popular Culture in America and The Criminalization of Black Society

1969 Black Powers at your door; 1982 hip hop was on the floor; 1992 gangster crack prevails, 1999 our colors fill the jails.

-Stevie Wonder, "Misrepresented People", *Bamboozled*, 2000.

This last section will examine the evolution of racialized pop-culture and the increasing criminalization and marginalization of black society towards the end of the twentieth century and into the present day. One of the greatest social problems in America today is race relations and some argue that we may be facing a climactic point in American history that has the potential to erupt into a new "race war". In his book *The Coming Race War in America*, Carl T. Rowan breaks down the growing trepidations between white supremacists and anti-white groups attempting to assimilate into American society. He identifies white radical extremists both in the christian right and so called "new patriot" militias arming themselves for the coming conflict.

The scapegoating of American economic problems onto immigrants and foreigners as well as the fervor over affirmative action programs first instituted under Johnson sparked conservative backlash against so called "liberal" policies. It seems that "almost every presidential candidate now strives to convince voters that black, hispanic and female recipients of undeserved economic preferences are really to blame" for the economic problems facing the United States.¹⁴¹ One problem that exacerbates these

¹⁴¹Carl T. Rowan, *The Coming Race War in America: A Wake Up Call* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1996), 7.

issues is the belief that Americans live in a post-racial society and many wish to believe that every American has equal opportunity for social mobility, yet this is not the case. Black society has seen vast advancement and successes in the years following the Civil Rights Era, but Blacks incomes and access to social services and post-secondary education are still far below the averages of whites.¹⁴²

Rowan also wants to showcase the impact of the increasing income disparity between the poor and the rich in the modern U.S. The impact of this growing wealth redistribution on poor and working class whites has fueled many white fears and social anxieties, culminating in the rise of fear-mongering right wing extremists politicians. The election of Donald Trump in 2016 is a foreshadowing of this reality that can only be counteracted with understanding, compassion and knowledge. This section is an attempt to give some context and perspective as to how this reemergence of white supremacy in our society is a product of the history of white domination and racial hierarchy in America.

Looking at this through the lense of black repression enables a wholesale evaluation of how fair and equal American society really is. How whites have been conditioned by pop-culture and political rhetoric to fear “others,” which also helps to reinforce conservative voter support. In this section, many voices from hip hop artists, Black scholars and the images of the Blaxploitation era will be utilized to show both the resistance of black society and ways in which American pop-culture helps to make Black Americans a “misrepresented people”. In 2008, underground Hip Hop artist

¹⁴² Jennifer L. Hochschild, *Facing Up to the American Dream*, (Princeton, N.J.:Princeton University Press, 1995), 39-42.

Immortal Technique highlights the ways in which these images have corrupted the minds of American youth in the song *Caught in a Hustle*, when he states that:

I used to wonder why people don't believe in themselves, then i saw the way they portrayed us to everyone else, they've cursed us to only see the worst in ourselves, blind to the fact the whole time we were hurting ourselves

In the late twentieth and early twenty first century, popular culture has evolved into one of the most prevalent constants in American society. From Hollywood to Death Row Records, one of the greatest American exports of the twenty first century is it's own pop-culture. The unimaginable ability to entertain millions of human beings of all colors and creeds, is almost overshadowed by the immense cost of taking this responsibility too lightly. By allowing racist rhetoric and imagery to dominate pop-culture racial hierarchies and white supremacy can be maintained by a conditioning of American society to a consensus of racial fear and prejudice.

Many American cartoons up until the 1970s, (remember, almost all of these cartoons were directed towards kids as the target audience), only included black characters that reinforced the racial stereotypes of the time. Take *Jungle Jitters* (1938) by Warner Brothers and *Scrub Me Mama with a Boogie Beat* (1941) by Universal Pictures, both of which were produced by large studios that were very popular at the time. Both cartoons sought to project the black image as lazy, uncivilized and incapable of order and production without the presence of a white overseer. Blackface, and racialized uncle toms and mammies, up until the 1960s, were the dominant portrayals of blackness that pervaded Hollywood films with only a few exceptions. This all changed following the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, where "black leaders and black

protest organizations began calling for a change in the subservient black characters that had appeared on the silver screen prior to [the 1960's], ... with threats of audience boycotts if changes were not made".¹⁴³

No longer were Blacks willing to allow such stereotypical racist imagery to dominate pop-culture. Racial pride began to flourish in the black community, Black Power and Black Nationalism came to offer a new sense of self-love and community (from hair, to fashion and religion). This coincided with a re emergence of people and organizations dedicated to Black history and the never ending struggle for justice. Images of toms, coons and mammies, "routinely trotted out in films about the antebellum south to justify slavery by displaying the obvious inferiority of lazy, dim-witted or fiercely loyal black slaves," did not fly with blacks now filled with self-love and an increased sense of racial pride.¹⁴⁴ In 1963 the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples (NAACP) and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) were challenging the discrimination in hiring and racialized roles being casted within Hollywood, by 1969 the U.S. Justice Department "planned to sue six film studios and two television networks over racial discrimination in hiring".¹⁴⁵

The reality was that, although black protesters were able to challenge and eliminate many of the harmful racist images and stereotypes that persisted in American pop-culture for more than a century. They did not stop white domination of pop-culture

¹⁴³ Covington, *Crime and Racial Constructions*, 39. Also see Stacy Kinlock Sewell, "The "Not-Buying Power" of the Black Community: Urban Boycotts and Equal Employment Opportunity, 1960-1964." *The Journal of African American History*, 89, no. 2 (2004): 135-51 for a better in depth look at the impact of economic boycotts by Blacks in American society during the Civil Rights Era.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 39. Also see Bogle, *Toms, Coons and Mammies*, 195.

¹⁴⁵ Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 85. Also see Covington, *Crime and Racial Constructions*, 39.

and even prior to the Civil Rights protests of the sixties studios had already begun to shift their attitudes towards race. In a book by Brian Locke on the racial stigma inherent within Hollywood cinema, he believes that during World War II studios began to implement black and white buddy films or what Robyn Wiegman calls “interracial male bonding narratives”.¹⁴⁶ The purpose of these films was to alleviate the role of Black vs white racism in American society and replace it with a unity and shared fear of foreigners, in this case Asians. Locke connects this to the more recent film *Crash* in its portrayal of black and white unity in response to those seen as “others” and foreign.

The point is that films today do not consist of the same overt racism that pervaded the earlier era of American pop-culture. The stereotypical images may have changed, but there exists today a different set of prejudices within American music, film, television and society. In many ways, the Tom and Mammy has evolved into the pimp/gangster and the ho. From early Blaxploitation films like *Black Caesar* (1973) and *Superfly* (1973) to the later hood or “ghettocentric action films” such as *New Jack City* (1991) and *Menace II Society* (1993). The Black image is presented as criminal and fueled with white fear of ultra-violent, hyper sexualized free young Black males. Today, the same racialized images of the plantation have seeped into the ears and eyes of the American public and albeit in a transformed and more subtle sense, still preconstruct many's view of blackness in America.

¹⁴⁶ Brian Locke, *Racial Stigma On the Hollywood Screen from World War II to the Present: The Orientalist Buddy Film*, (New York Palgrave, 2009), 6. Also see Robyn Wiegman, *American Anatomies: Theorizing Race and Gender* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 117.

State of Black Society in America following the Suppression of Black Power

There has been several works dedicated to understanding black political and civil rights leaders in the post-civil rights era. *We Have No Leaders* by Robert C. Smith and *Race Matters* by Cornel West are two excellent places to look for an understanding of modern black leadership. Smith argues that the two main political parties in America, The Democrats and Republicans, have both given up on fighting for Black rights, equality, affirmative action and social welfare. He points to failed attempts by the Congressional Black Caucus throughout the 1980s to gain budget support from the Democratic Party as examples of the invisibility of Black politicians and the neglect from white leaders in politics. Smith states that, “the Congressional Black Caucus’s budgets have been invisible, ignored by the Congress and the national media, leaving black members of the House frustrated, and isolated from mainstream politics”.¹⁴⁷ The problem, then, is political and the ways in which Black political groups and institutions rely on white support for their survival.

Smith points to the power of various PACs (Political Action Committees) and their ability to garnish large financial support for political and social organizations and politicians. Blacks have been unable to secure powerful lobbying groups in Washington as other minority groups, such as the American-Israel Political Action Committee (AIPAC), have. Their political leaders and organizations have been marginalized, leading Smith to conclude that “the black movement has been wholly encapsulated into mainstream institutions,... as a result it has become largely irrelevant in terms of a

¹⁴⁷ Robert C. Smith, *We Have No Leaders: African Americans in the Post-Civil Rights Era*, (New York: State University of New York Presses, 1996), 211.

politics and policies that would address the multifaceted problems of race in the post-civil rights era".¹⁴⁸ The economic and housing conditions, lack of access to higher education and lack of job opportunities along with discrimination and gentrification within urban inner city communities has in many cases worsened the issues defined by the Kerner Commission as the primary cause of crime, poverty and inequality in America. The ability of white politicians to push aside the social problems within Black communities is one of the more subtle ways many silently support white supremacy within American politics and society. The ones who suffer most from this willful ignorance are the Black communities and cultures that are further isolated from politicians and mainstream America.

West comes to a similar conclusion, but puts less emphasis on politics and more emphasis on market forces and the breakdown of black family life and values as the main causes for a lack of Black leadership in modern U.S. society. He highlights the fact that blacks had "the lowest suicide rate in America until the seventies, but now lead the country in the rate of increase in suicides". West believes that the nihilistic threat, that is "the lived experience of coping with a life of horrifying meaningless, hopelessness and (most important) lovelessness", is one of the major factors for the rise of suicides and for the loss of powerful Black leadership.¹⁴⁹ The combination of nihilism with capitalism and the materialism of the consumer culture, has led to a loss of community action in favor of more immediate, individualistic and self-serving goals for profit and progress.

¹⁴⁸Smith, *We Have No Leaders*, xvi.

¹⁴⁹ Cornel West, *Race Matters*, (New York: First Vintage Books, 1994), 22-24. Also see Lewis, Judith. 1995. "The Impact of Racism on American Family Life." *The Family Journal* 3 (2): 132-133.

Market forces, according to West, have eroded the family values and morals of American society, money and fame became more important than family and morality. These ideals and images prevalent within American pop-culture have corrupted the minds of many, particularly those, “living in poverty ridden conditions with limited capacity to ward off self-contempt and self hatred, resulting in the possible triumph of the nihilistic threat in Black America”.¹⁵⁰ Instead of unity, community activism and persistent protest, West believes many blacks have begun to victimize their own communities in search of quick profits and status. Self love and unity are two remedies given for this crisis, yet the bigger issue is the way materialism and power corrupt individuals away from helping their community, only when politicians care more about their society then their luxury suits and fortunes can effective change be made.

Black on Black violence and particularly violence against Black women has steadily increased since the 1970s, the rise of gangs and drugs into American inner cities plays a large role in this. In section II, we looked at the role of the state in counter-subverting the Black Power Movement and the neutralizing and/or eliminating of civil rights and Black Power leaders. A major factor in the loss of powerful black leadership following the late 60's and early 70's was the suppression Black Power organizations and identity. The methods utilized by the state to subvert the BPP, SCLC, SNCC, RAM and dozens of other civil rights and Black Power groups had a lasting effect on black society in America.

The assassinations, bogus mail campaigns, snitch-jacketing and misinformation spread by state agencies effectively eliminated successful black leaders and Black

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 27. Also see Lewis, "The Impact of Racism".

Power organizations. It was this attack on Black Power that destroyed all unity and spread mistrust, hate and jealousy throughout these groups effectively splintering the BPP into groups more concerned with power in general rather than for Black people. Immortal Technique showcases this belief in his music when he states in the song “Caught in a Hustle,” that, “So I work hard until my personality splits, like the Black Panthers into the Bloods and the Crips,” he is pointing out that gangs took over the void left by the collapse of Black Power. State agencies did not respond with the same vehemence towards Black gangs as they had against the BPP, instead many gangs were allowed to take over inner cities and control the increasing drug trade that now was beginning to flow like floodwaters into the inner city ghettos of America.

One last factor that has contributed to the loss of Black unity is, the “player mentality”. As West points out the role of market forces in eroding morality and family. Other black scholars such as Bakari Kitwana and Zoe Spencer point out the problem of how many black rappers and celebrities careers have been made off of acting like pimps and whose music videos are full of booty shaking barely dressed women and sexual innuendos advocating for promiscuous sexuality. The role of a player is to have as many sexual encounters as possible without becoming attached to one specific female and establishing a familial relationship. Take Jay-Z one of the greatest selling rap artists of the twentieth century with his songs ‘99 problems,” where the chorus goes “99 problems but a bitch ain’t one,” and “Big Pimpin” with lyrics such as, “Fuck em, Love em and Leave em, cause i don’t need em”. This proves the way in which women are constantly assaulted with demeaning language in pop-culture and also how the player mentality becomes a divisive force, if one cannot trust or establish stable families.

50 Cent states in his song “P.I.M.P.,” that, “I don’t know what you heard about me, but a bitch can’t get a dollar out of me, no Cadillac, no perms, you can’t see, that i’m a P.I.M.P.,” this exemplifies the player mentality and shows how even those with millions of dollars still have no time or money for women other than for sex. The argument that this is “just entertainment” does not stop the power these lyrics have to condition the youth of America. Zoe Spencer writes in her book *Murda, Misogyny and Mayhem* that “no dissemination of information is without purpose” and that “no matter how it is rationalized, no repetitive promotion of images and information, messages, etc., will fail to have a psychological impact on those who are exposed”.¹⁵¹ Many impressionable youth are mesmerized by these figures and aspire to the status and wealth of rap stars and celebrities, adopting the player mentality to mimic their celebrity idols.

There can be no doubt that the player mentality has played a role in eroding American families and racialized pop-cultural images has been a big factor in this. The lyrics of one hip hop song points out that this indeed maybe the case. Immortal Technique, when talking about how the “wanting to be a ‘player’” mindset has affected minority communities, raps that, “somebody did your mother like that, that’s why you fatherless, before jail and crooked cops and that’s what the problem is”.¹⁵² The impact of promoting sex and promiscuity is not coincidental and is part of a profit driven market that seeks money, not morality. As monogamous relationships become uncool according to mainstream rap lyrics and film, and the pursuit of money and power overcome the want for family and love, the destabilization of poor communities only

¹⁵¹ Zoe Spencer, *Murda, Misogyny and Mayhem: Hip Hop and the Culture of Abnormality in the Urban Community* (New York: University Press of America, 2011), 7.

¹⁵² These lyrics are from the song: Immortal Technique, “Reverse Pimpology,” *Third World*, 2008.

deepens. At the end of the day it is the consumer who has the purchasing power to determine the future of societal trends, yet the impact of corporations and generations of pop-culture conditioning has marginalized all social and political activism within mainstream hip hop and film.

Spencer sees the media as a hegemonic tool that is used to indoctrinate Americans to see the world based on the outlook of the dominant class/race. Cultural and ideological hegemony are extremely powerful and dangerous forces when certain media conglomerates have the monopoly to control a large majority of the information that is disseminated in the news, television, music and films. In fact, Spencer believes that mainstream hip hop and many majority news media representations of blackness are simply a neo-colonial perspective meant to reaffirm racial hierarchies and white domination within American society. She explains that:

Today's Hip Hop is a direct undeniable mimic of the historic stereotypes that were developed, promoted and utilized to promote the exploitation and oppression of a people,... the stereotypes and representations of the Jezebel and the Buck, promoted the notions of the biological, sexual and intellectual inferiority of the African and utilized to justify their enslavement,.. It was okay to use Black women like 'bitches,' and using Black men like 'studs,' breeding them and [then] separating them from [their] 'bitch' and [their] offspring.¹⁵³

Spencer connects these paternalistic and plantation ideologies with new age mainstream urban pop-culture and the player mentality, that seeks to reiterate the same myths and misrepresentations that were used to justify slavery. She proclaims that, "now, Hip Hop artists readily assume these stereotypes".

¹⁵³ Spencer. *Murda and Mayhem*, 5-6.

The questions of representation and authenticity become very important when discussing the impact and role of pop-culture and media representations of Blacks in American society. The fact is that many do not realize that outside of the internet, media such as the television, radio, news media, along with the music and film industry are highly regulated, controlled and monitored. Mega-corporations and media conglomerates have controlled the dissemination of information in American society for centuries. It would be completely naive to believe that such entities would not have an agenda, of course profits are the most immediate goals, another goal is the ability to maintain American soft power and cultural hegemony by controlling the way in which Americans view themselves, their society and the world. In short, by controlling the flow of information the dominant group, race and/or class has the ability to control how a race, class, and/or culture is perceived by the rest of those who view the same media. Americans must look to where they get their 'news' from and to what music they listen to and what movies they watch, to understand how we are being conditioned to view society through the eyes of the dominant class and indoctrinated to accept their views.

American Society in the Post-Civil Rights Era

The Other America published in 1962 by Michael Harrington, deals with the economics of the 1960s and his research brings out certain factors that greatly contributed to the problems within the inner cities. This book became very influential within the anti-poverty crusades of the decade, as his shocking revelations of the increasing plight of the poor opened many eyes to the severity of the issue. One of the major factors that Harrington sees as increasingly problematic was not necessarily

poverty itself, but the increase in affluence within American suburbs and the middle class lulled many to ignore the plight of the poor.¹⁵⁴ Consumer culture and materialism, were becoming more prevalent and the entertainment industry was becoming a billion dollar enterprise by 1960.

At this same time, white Americans were largely fleeing inner cities for the suburban landscapes that were sprouting up on the outskirts of cities. As whites fled the inner city, so did many of the social services, community programs and government support that did not reach these communities in the same way following the “white flight”.¹⁵⁵ Civil Rights progress led to the desegregation of American cities, in response many whites chose to segregate themselves in suburbs and control the population of their own communities in many cases to restrict black residency. Instead of the outright violence of sundown towns, although this did occur, these communities would use legal restrictions and deny black access to these communities, even if it was to simply use the beach.¹⁵⁶

Blaxploitation Films and the Evolution of Racialized Pop-Culture

This sections focuses on Blaxploitation films of the early to mid 1970s, yet it is important to first note that these were not the first Black films in American film history. S.

¹⁵⁴ Michael Harrington, *The Other America, Poverty In the United States*, (New York: Scribner, 1962), 234-7. Harrington identifies how those countries who suffer from extreme poverty are much more willing to mobilize nationally against poor conditions, but in America, “Because its poverty is not so deadly, because so many are enjoying a decent standard of life, there are indifference and blindness to the plight of the poor. There are even those who deny that the culture of poverty exists”.

¹⁵⁵ Loewen, *Sundown Towns*, 466-70. Also see Samuel H. Kye, (2018) “The Persistence of White Flight in Middle Class Suburbia”, *Social Science Research* 72, 38-40.

¹⁵⁶ Harrington, *The Other America*, 229. Also see *Backstory Radio*, “Shore Thing: A History of the Beach”, ep. 0243, July 13, 2018 for an example of white oceanside suburbs restricting urban minorities from beach access, leading many to protest against these segregationist and elitist policies.

Craig Watkins breaks down black films into four chronological groups: race films, Blaxploitation, independent filmmaking and the independent film/commercial trend. He identifies race films as, “the earliest formations of Black American filmmaking..., [that] began to take shape during the first decades of the twentieth century”.¹⁵⁷ These films were created by African Americans in many ways to provide a visual response to white racism within American pop-culture of the time (i.e. *Birth of a Nation* (1915)). Watkins contends that, “race movies represent an important cultural and political response to the presence of segregation -de facto in the North and de jure in the South”. He points to the fact that public movie houses denied blacks entry and thus opened the door for the success of black films and Black-only cinemas.

The most prominent Black filmmaker during this era was Oscar Micheaux, who produced over 40 films in the early to mid twentieth century. He has been recently labeled as the “Czar of Black Hollywood” with such films as *Within Our Gates* (1920), *Body and Soul* and *The Betrayal* (1948), all of which stand the test of time. Cheryl Wetzstein, in an article for the *Washington Post* titled “Black Side of the Silver Screen”, describes the contrast between Micheaux and Hollywood when she argues that:

In contrast to Hollywood’s mainstream movies that limited blacks to roles as buffoons or menial workers, Micheaux’s all-black casts showed complex men and women with dignity, intelligence, economic solidarity and racial pride. His films didn’t shy away from racial issues, including mixed-race romances, even though some theaters banned his daring work. His second film, the 1920

¹⁵⁷ S. Craig Watkins, *Representing: Hip Hop Culture and the Production of Black Cinema*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 91.

silent “Within Our Gates,” was widely seen as a direct response to the racist arguments put forward in D.W. Griffith’s classic “Birth of a Nation.”¹⁵⁸

Mischeaux was not alone in this struggle to produce authentic visual representations of African Americans, yet he did make the biggest impact, for instance his film *The Betrayal* (1948) was the first Black made film to be shown in a white movie theatre. The era of race movies would mark an important milestone in Black progress to challenge white dominated pop-cultural spaces, but it did not have as great an impact on Hollywood as many would have hoped. Race films died out by the birth of the Civil Rights Era of the 1960s which challenged the segregation and discrimination within American cities and pushed for a more integrationist society. Watkins explains how, “this philosophical shift emphasized integration and assimilation rather than economic development as the way to racial equality”, effectively making race films unpopular.¹⁵⁹

Black filmmaking would not return with the same tenacity until Blaxploitation hit the scene, that did not mean that black actors/actresses were out of work, it just meant they had to assume the roles established for them by whites. Some argue that *The Defiant Ones* (1954) was the first Hollywood film to allow Blacks to exhibit some sense of authenticity and agency. Certainly this was the case by the time of the rise of a high profile Black actor like Sidney Poitier by the early 1960s, yet even these characters were not as empowered as they seemed. Some argue that Poitier’s films addressed the “race question,” the movie *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* (1967) finally allowed scenes

¹⁵⁸ Cheryl Wetzstein, “Black Side of the Silver Screen”, *Washington Post*, April 30, 2014. Also see Jesse Algon Rhines, *Black Film/White Money*, (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 2, for a discussion of Micheaux’s response to the release of *Birth of a Nation* and his impact on Black film in general.

¹⁵⁹ Watkins, *Representing*, 92.

of interracial love and marriage to be shown after decades of being censored and banned from Hollywood films.

Poitier would become one of the most successful black actors starring in hit films *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967) and *In the Heat of the Night* (1967) both of which won several Oscar's, yet "black audiences were a little weary of Poitier's assimilationist black characters as many regarded them as sexless and unassertive".¹⁶⁰ In short, Poitier was accused of being an Uncle Tom in the sense that his characters never attempted to address Black issues or appeal to Black interests. Poitier was seen as inauthentic by many Black audiences who saw his middle class integrationist characters "as frequently trying to make themselves acceptable to a white-dominated society and/or simply trying to help whites solve their problems".¹⁶¹ White filmmakers attempted to use these assimilationist and post-racialized themes to undermine and pervert the Black struggle and experience within American society.

By the early 1970s a new form of Black film emerged, this new motion picture sought to visualize the conditions of inner city ghettos and bring to the screen the struggle of Black America. These films became known as blaxploitation because they were exploiting black images and attempting to associate it with crime, vice and sex. Junius Griffin of the NAACP dubbed the term black exploitation (Blaxploitation) as a demeaning term for such black films and films that supposedly were meant to represent blacks.¹⁶² Hollywood and white filmmakers have had a long history of perverting the black image to degrading stereotypical images historically meant to reinforce black

¹⁶⁰ Covington, *Crime and Racial Construction*, 40, Also see Bogle, Toms, Coons and Mammies, 183 and Rhines, *Black Film/White Money*, 40.

¹⁶¹ Covington, *Crime and Racial Construction*, 40 Also see Rhines, *Black Film/White Money*, 40.

¹⁶² "NAACP Blasts Super-Nigger Trend", *Variety*, August 16, 1972, 2.

“inferiority” in the mind of white American society. As we will see it would not only be white filmmakers that would produce such exploitative material and some blacks filmmakers would also create films that would be attacked by members of the Black community as gross misrepresentation of black life and values.¹⁶³ The two most important factors when discussing Blacks representation in film are: Black agency and authenticity.

Black agency means the amount of control a black person has over their role, or the ability of the character they play to overcome racial, political and socio-economic conditions placed upon them in the film. Black authenticity would be, how “real” is the film in terms of how truthfully it conveys the image of blackness within American society. One very relevant point here is that Black film is not a new innovation and blacks have been making films for decades, similar to black newspapers these films generally circulated various local black cinemas across America such as the Oriental Theatre in Chicago’s Loop district (Although, it was not until after the initial screening of *Sweetback* that it became an exclusively black cinema).¹⁶⁴ Racialized Black images within Hollywood, early cartoons, television and the news media were also not new, the point to be made here is that these films were being produced for whites. Thus, the target audience is also a very important aspect to understand when examining pop-cultural artifacts.

¹⁶³ *Superfly* and *Sweetback* both suffered harsh criticism from black organizations such as the NAACP and Nation of Islam. It was actually within Junius Griffin’s critique of *Superfly* that the term “blaxploitation” began, they believed the overblown images of sex, violence and criminality were gross misrepresentation of Black culture and society. See the Introduction to *Beyond Blaxploitation* by Novotny Lawrence for an academic discussion of this history.

¹⁶⁴ Gerald R. Butters, Jr., “*Sweetback* in Chicago”, in *Beyond Blaxploitation*, Ed. Novotny Lawrence and Gerald Butters Jr., (Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 2016), 63-4.

One must always be critical of marginalization and misrepresentation in film and many Black actors in American history were criticized for taking stereotypical roles that were seen by many as degrading. Actors such as Hattie McDaniel who continuously was casted as the prototypical Mammy character in film after film, almost always turning a stereotyped role into an award winning performance. Actors like Bill "Bojangles" Robinson and Mantan Moreland played the role of the Tom and Coon in every role they would get, but that's just it these would be the only roles white filmmakers would allow Black actors/actresses to play.¹⁶⁵

Andre Seewood in attempting to define and understand Black agency within both Black and white films, breaks down films made by blacks and those that include Black characters into three groups: The Compromised Black Film, The Genuine Black Film and the The Pseudo-Inclusive White Film.¹⁶⁶ Essentially, a Compromised Black film in many cases is a film that contains black characters, themes and communities, but centers around a white lead character. A film like *Detroit 9000* (1973) fits this description, where Lt. Danny Bassett becomes both the leading detective and white savior, while black characters such as Detective Jesse Williams seem to be part of the film only to reassure the audience of the honesty and progressiveness of Bassett.

Novotny Lawrence discusses a scene from *9000* that relates the films post-racialized message. After discovering the gang of thieves they are looking for contains peoples of many races and was not a single racial group, Williams exclaims that, "Do you know everybody's screwed up? This whole city? Everybody but Danny". Novotny

¹⁶⁵ Bogle, *Toms, Coons and Mulattos*, 48 & 72.

¹⁶⁶ Andre Seewood, "Towards Defining the Black Film: The Genuine, the Compromised, and the Token", *IndieWire.com*, March, 2 2015. Retrieved from <https://www.indiewire.com/2015/03/towards-defining-the-black-film-the-genuine-the-compromised-and-the-token-155411/>.

believes that this dialogue exemplifies the ways in which the film is reinforcing white racial hierarchies. As Lawrence explains, “the assumption that criminality is an equal-opportunity offender..., renders the social, economic and political discrimination that blacks had historically endured in Detroit moot”.¹⁶⁷ Blacks in such films utilize no agency or ability to overcome their circumstances and rely on white leads to “save them”. Thus, the Compromised Black Film has generally been more about appealing to post-racialist and neo-paternalist ideologies than about making a truthful Black film, these films have even been dubbed white savior tropes.

The Genuine Black Film is the exact opposite of the Compromised Black Film, Black characters in such films as *Sweet Sweetback* (1971), *Cotton Comes to Harlem* (1970) and *Bucktown USA* (1975), took full control over and overcame their circumstances. Seewood, points in particular to *Bucktown USA* as the perfect example of a Genuine Black Film and how these films generally challenge the status quo of American society. He explains that:

A film like Arthur Marks’ *BUCKTOWN USA* (1975) where Black characters exercise full dramatic agency against Whites and then amongst themselves reveals that a Genuine Black film is by the nature of its very existence against the dominant ideology.

The final category is the Pseudo-Inclusive White Film, which is a white film that throws in a couple of token Black characters to not only appeal to Black audiences, but to adorn the veneer of racial inclusion and tolerance as well. Seewood believes these films are, “By far, the most dangerous kind of film in that White filmmakers feign racial

¹⁶⁷ Novotny Lawrence , “A White Film for a Blaxploitation Audience: The Making and Marketing of *Detroit 9000*”, in *Beyond Blaxploitation*, Ed. Novotny Lawrence and Gerald Butters Jr., (Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 2016), 127.

tolerance and inclusion by placing Black or minority actors in a high profile film". These films wish to whitewash the Black historical struggle and utilize post-racial messages to "unify the races" or rather to assimilate them under white domination. Blacks acting in these Token roles would obtain access to high paying gigs, Hollywood and the large budgets white filmmakers enjoyed, "but the characters themselves lack any substantive dramatic agency and therefore are mere tokens supporting the illusion of White supremacy in cinematic narration".¹⁶⁸

The purpose here is to understand that Black agency especially in white films is never absolute, many acting jobs have been fully restricted to Blacks for centuries and even in the Blaxploitation era when so called Black films dominated the box office, whites still controlled the budgets and censored all films considered too revolutionary for white audiences. The impact of the Compromised Black Film and Pseudo-Inclusive White Film in conditioning Americans to a post-racialized and neo-paternalistic attitude is also an important factor that could certainly help to understand many misconceptions surrounding race relations in American history.

Initial Blaxploitation films, which began to appear in the early 1970s, were made by blacks for blacks and sought to showcase the problems within urban minority communities and as with *Sweet Sweetback*, these films sought to stick it to the Man. "The Man," was a subjective term meant to represent the oppressions of white policymakers and police on the black community. These films represented crime as the only way out of poverty in a society that consistently sought to staunch all efforts of black progress. Following the commercial success of *Sweetback*, Hollywood realized

¹⁶⁸ Seewood, *Defining the Black Film*.

the huge profit potential of black audiences. White film-makers co-opted Blaxploitation films and instead of highlighting the disadvantages and desperation of those who turn to crime, Blacks in these films became trigger happy criminals that did crime because they were gangsters and enjoyed it. Mikel J. Koven in the *Pocket Essentials Blaxploitation Films* breaks down this issue of representation when he proclaims that:

There is a difference between how films like *Cotton*, *Sweet Sweetback* and *Suprefly* represent the black folk hero as opposed to how white film-makers in this genre present them, i.e. as criminals. In the black Blaxploitation Films, it is the Man who creates the socio-economic conditions whereby crime, or rather being “outside the law” is the only avenue open to young black men, whereas the Blaxploitation Films made by white film-makers represented a life of crime as exciting and enticing for young African Americans.¹⁶⁹

The white appropriation of Black creative innovations marginalizes the Black liberation movement and black struggle in America. This could be viewed as another example of mainstream attempts to push a post-racialized message and undermine revolutionary rhetoric, yet there is always two sides to every story.

It becomes problematic to simply say that all white made Blaxploitation films were consciously intended to promote stereotypical images and condition white American perceptions of Black people. Studios such as American International Pictures (AIP), General Film Corporation (GFC) and several other small studios began producing Blaxploitation, and other exploitation films primarily centered around sex and violence, with the intention to create a “product line of cheaply made films”.¹⁷⁰ Even though these

¹⁶⁹ Mikel J. Koven, *Pocket Essentials Film: Blaxploitation Films*, (North Pomfret: Trafalgar Square Publishing, 2001), 28.

¹⁷⁰ Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 69. Also See Lawrence, Introduction to *Beyond Blaxploitation*, 7-9.

films revolutionized certain elements of American film and culture through fashion, music, suggestive themes and anti-establishment rhetoric and also provided black actors/actresses with jobs, money and fame, most of these films were not good. They lacked quality production and apart from a few of the original blaxploitation films such as *Shaft* (1971), *Superfly* (1972), *Coffy* (1973), and a few others, they all pretty much were the same. As Film Historian Ed Guerrero states, “Blaxploitation’s high moment came” following the release of *Sweetback* and “the crystallization of the the blaxploitation formula under *Shaft* and *Superfly* which was followed by fifty cheap imitative productions”.¹⁷¹

This did not mean that Blacks did not feel proud in their roles or even looked at it in this light. Many were simply happy to have work in an industry that previously had excluded them, Yvonne Sims argues in her book *Women of Blaxploitation* that:

[These] movies, in spite of their flaws, offered a venue for African American actresses to begin to redefine their image even though studios still controlled the types of characters they portrayed.¹⁷²

Sims believes that Black women were able to break into powerful lead roles with Pam Grier and Tamara Dobson as prime examples. These action heroines who came to redefine Black beauty, opened the door for other actresses of color to gain some agency in a male dominated industry. There have been several relatively well made documentaries that focus on Blaxploitation film, *BaadAsssss Cinema* by Isaac Julien and *Classified X* by Melvin Van Peebles are two of the better ones. Both of these documentaries contain first hand accounts from the actors and actresses whose names

¹⁷¹ *Ibid*, 71.

¹⁷² Yvonne Sims, *Women of Blaxploitation: How the Black Action Film Heroine Changed American Popular Culture*, (Jefferson: Mcfarlane & Company, inc., 2006), 13.

became synonymous with Blaxploitation: Pam Grier, Samuel L. Jackson, Melvin Van Peebles, just to name a few. These actors/actresses were proud of their roles and did not see them as problematic, one reason for this is because Black audiences had been clamoring for Black heroes/heroines to grace the silver screen for over a century. In many ways it was not the Black audience that was the problem, it was the ways in which these images were perceived and utilized by white society to justify and reinforce racial stereotypes and prejudices.

I would like to put forth the argument that the primary reason blaxploitation films garnered such a bad reputation was because of the very fact they were made to be exploitation films. Sims explains how, “the objective of directors, studios and writers who produce such movies is to make money while offering a cursory glance that does not accurately portray societal concerns, but is meant strictly for entertainment value”.¹⁷³ Van Peebles when making *Sweetback* ran into the same problem many in the hip hop community faced a generation later, he needed to come to a compromise between making a product that focuses strictly on social and political problems and that could actually make money and be entertaining.¹⁷⁴ When one focuses entirely on social problems it becomes much harder to get funding, find distribution and to make people actually want to see it. In his expose into the economics behind the American film industry, Jesse Rhines in *Black Film/White Money* essentially concludes that, the problems with producing films is not about writing a good story, it is about finding

¹⁷³ Yvonne Sims, *Women of Blaxploitation*, 16.

¹⁷⁴ Melvin Van Peebles, *Classified X: Explore the Representation of African Americans in the History of American Cinema Through the Eyes of Melvin Van Peebles*, Channel 4 Television, 1998. Also see Butters, “Sweetback in Chicago,” for a discussion of the censorship and exclusion of Van Peebles films in the U.S. prior to his successful releases in France.

studios and distributors that are willing to work with it.¹⁷⁵ In the case of Black writers, directors and actors/actresses, none can effectively be fully empowered when they need to continuously rely on white money, studios and directors to make a mainstream Black film. As Van Peebles laments in *Classified X*:

African Americans are not allowed to tell African American middle class stories without studio, (i.e. white intervention)... and African American cineaste realizes that the deeper into the ghetto the story is set and the lower down on the economic scale the more likely the film is to be financed.¹⁷⁶

The ghettoization of Black representation in media and film will be discussed in the coming section, for now the point is that Black films were never truly under the control of Blacks, except for in a few rare cases.

The refusal of white filmmakers to take Black stories out of the ghetto is one of the primary examples of the attempts to maintain social and racial hierarchies through visual representation. It was also the primary reason why Blaxploitation films came to be misrepresentations, namely because they refused to show any other depictions of black life other than a very shallow glance into urban ghetto life. The very fact that Blaxploitation consists of only action films, is not because Blacks were only writing action stories or because these were the only films Blacks wanted to see, it was due to the reality that white studios only wanted to produce, promote and distribute ghetto action films. Thus, the greatest issue with Blaxploitation was that it was restricted from showing anything other than violence and sex, even when these were being used explicitly to address the socio-economic conditions of the ghetto, these images just so

¹⁷⁵ Rhines, *Black Film/White Money*, 153-4.

¹⁷⁶ Van Peebles, *Classified X*.

happened to be a reiteration of certain stereotypical neo-paternalist racialized images such as the jezebel and the buck. The pimps, pushers and prostitutes that pervaded these films were revolutionary because they finally allowed Black heroes/heroines to gain some agency in a white dominated industry, yet the roles that allowed for this also happened to enable a conditioning and a re-establishment of white supremacist ideologies by only showing images of violent, oversexualized and criminalized Blacks in mainstream films.

Hood Films to Gangster Rap and the Victimization of Urban Minority Communities

By 1975, Blaxploitation had reached its demise due to oversaturation, decrease in profits and critical reactions against the misrepresentation of African Americans. Guerrero outlines that by this time, “Hollywood had developed more subtle and masked forms of devaluing African Americans. And when Hollywood no longer needed its cheap, black product line for its economic survival, it reverted to traditional and openly stereotypical modes of representation”.¹⁷⁷ Blacks would not be able to break back into mainstream cinema until the 1990s with the rise of Hood Films, (yet another reiteration of the ghettocentric-action flick). By the late 1970s, Hollywood realized that it could keep, and still reap the profits of black audiences by producing, “‘crossover’ films..., [that] focused on the careers of a few isolated black celebrities who fit into the traditional, white-dominated ‘star system’”.¹⁷⁸ The marginalization of Black films, Black

¹⁷⁷ Guerrero, *Framing Blackness*, 70.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 71. Also see Rhines, *Black Film/White Money*, 69-70 and Brian Locke, *Racial Stigma on the Hollywood Screen*, 75-128 for a discussion of the rise of these “crossover” or “interracial buddy films” following the demise of Blaxploitation in the late 1970’s.

actors/actresses and Black culture following Blaxploitation and through the “cinema of recuperation” period of the 1980s is documented in Guerrero’s *Framing Blackness*. “Recuperation,” was a period of conservative backlash and a relapse from the more progressive films of the 60s and 70s, back into more white male domination of the themes and imagery that made its way into mainstream film.

In this section, we will jump forward into the next period in which Black dominated films were able to make their way into the mainstream. Hood Films, which were ghettocentric action films that focused on Black urban youth, came to be the next major Black film genre that was able to gain mainstream access. These films were infused with a new form of Hip Hop dubbed, Gangster Rap, that quickly asserted itself as the new “voice of the ghetto”. The creation of the Hood Film genre and the rise of Gangster Rap coincide to become the new manifestation of and re-iteration of black representation in film, music and the media at the end of the twentieth century.

Before we proceed here, it is important to give a quick preface to the reasons why this topic is very important. Growing up in the late 90s and early 2000s my generation was exposed to the evolution of Hip Hop and the impact of Gangster Rap/ Hood Films on adolescent youth, both black and white. In fact, one could even say that Hip Hop and the revolutionary/subversive lyrics of artists such as Wise Intelligent of Poor Righteous Teachers (PRT), Tupac Shakur and/or Immortal Technique inspired me to undertake the study of history and write this thesis. Hip Hop is one of the greatest forms of self-expression, and the manifestations of creative thought is one of the hardest skills to successfully master, but mainstream Hip Hop, when censored and

controlled by white studio executives, censors and even by some Black media outlets such as B.E.T, can become an incredibly destructive force.

As with Blaxploitation the problems with the new Black music and film genres is that once the white dominated industry realized the market and profit potential of Hip Hop, it quickly came to dominate and control the images and sounds that made their way into the mainstream. When one takes even a second to study the lyrics of artist prior to the “corporate takeover” of Hip Hop it is not hard to see the difference, between independent artist’s records and those that came to be promoted and distributed by major record labels. These were many independent artists and groups such as Wise Intelligent, Public Enemy, X-clan, to name a few, the themes are completely focused on challenging the status quo in America (racial hierarchies), promoting Black power and pride, as well as uniting inner city communities. Take the song, “ Fight the Power,” one of the first Hip Hop songs to gain mainstream airplay, Chuck D’s second verse states:

What counts is that the rhymes, designed to fill your mind, now that you've realized the pride's arrived, We got to pump the stuff to make us tough, from the heart, It's a start, a work of art, to revolutionize make a change nothing's strange..., Fight the Power, Fight the Power!¹⁷⁹

These lyrics are uplifting and promote positive change, resistance and activism, now take a look at the lyrics of one of the first records to be sold through a major label. Death Row Records produced the album *The Chronic* (1992), which is full of explicit content and contains a song called “Bitches Ain’t Shit.” Benjamin Bowser labels this song as the epitome of classic Gangster Rap. Dr. Dre and Snoop Dogg rap that,

¹⁷⁹ Public Enemy, “Fight The Power”, *Fear of a Black Planet*, (Def Jam, 1990).

Bitch can't hang with the streets, she found herself short, so now she's taking me to court..., as we groove up the block, see my girl's house, "Dre, pass the Glock" kick in the do', I look on the flo' It's my little cousin Daz and he's fucking my ho, yo (Bitches ain't shit) I un-cock my shit I'm heart broke but I'm still locked..., Man, fuck a bitch.¹⁸⁰

The difference is easy to comprehend and the reality is that these messages and themes play a large role in the shaping of adolescent minds. As with Black film, pop-culture can be a wonderful entertaining and cultural force, yet as Zoe Spencer identifies the hegemonic power of this cultural force can also be used to exploit, demean and devalue the history, people and culture of a minority in order to maintain racial and social hierarchies.¹⁸¹

A full history of the development of Hip Hop culture is not required here , Tricia Rose in her book *Black Noise* and Jeff Chang in his book *Can't Stop Won't Stop* do a much better job articulating this history than I could. What I do want to do here, is to give a short introduction to the reasons for why it was necessary at the time, and why I believe, as with all great artforms, the music became corrupted once it was commercialized. As soon as the large corporations took over Hip Hop the messages and themes of resistance and revolution were replaced with "Gangster Rap [and] its focus on violence, gun use, consuming and selling drugs, and killing others".¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Dr. Dre and Snoop Dogg, "Bitches Ain't Shit", *The Chronic*, (Death Row Records, 1992). Some critics have also hailed this album as "raw realism" and many still defend it as revolutionary for its innovative production and its impact on the evolution of the Hip Hop genre. See Havelock, Nelson, "The Chronic," *Rolling Stone*, March 18, 1993.

¹⁸¹ Zoe Spencer, *Murder & Mayhem*, 8-10.

¹⁸² Benjamin J. Bowser, *Gangster Rap and Its Social Costs: Exploiting Hip Hop And Racial Stereotypes to Entertain America*, (Amherst: Cambria Press, 2012), 67.

Now again, to be clear, it was not the intention of these labels and/or corporations to project such stereotypical, misogynistic and racialized imagery. Their intention was to make profits, sex and violence sells! And they just so happen to be ubiquitous with American society and pop-culture, these were not invented by Hip Hop, white mob films and cop shows are just as violent as any Gangster Rap song and the American Porn Industry puts out more sexual content than any other country in the world. Two of the most distinguished lecturers and scholars on Black society and culture, Dr. Royce Watkins and Michael Eric Dyson debated the impact Hip Hop culture was having on Black youth in America and both of their arguments help to further our discussion here. Watkins was taking the side that mainstream Hip Hop is degrading and devaluing Blacks in America, while Dyson, who was not really disagreeing with Watkins, took more of a defensive position. Dyson essentially articulated what has been stated above, that sex, violence and even mass incarceration did not begin with Hip Hop and these would still be here without it. He argues that just like Blaxploitation films, Black rappers and artists have much more agency and power within the music industry then they did decades ago.¹⁸³ This is all true, just as the fact that hip hop employs more blacks than most other industries and that most artists are actually making positive conscious music, it just does not make it into the mainstream.

Royce Watkins argument is a little more pressing, he points out the difference of representation and vilification, he is more arguing for the psychological factors that continuously condition black youth to be “thugs”. This same conditioning is utilized in

¹⁸³ This debate took place at Brown University in 2014 between Dr. Royce Watkins and Michael Eric Dyson. A video copy of the debate can be accessed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3QuOwST5o1Q&t=2845s>.

reverse to shape the preconceptions of blacks within American society. He contends that “you never wanna learn about black people from what you see on TV, especially Black Entertainment Television (B.E.T)”. The fact is that racism can become systemic and institutionalized to the point that those who want to climb the corporate ladder must sacrifice their morality for monopoly, this goes for both Blacks and whites. Watkins when discussing the misrepresentations within pop-culture the impact it has on the indoctrination of Black youth, states that “racism is most effective when the racist has Black skin” and that if he had a choice between getting rid of the KKK and B.E.T., he would choose B.E.T. He explains that, B.E.T., continually gives awards to some of the most thuggish and Gangster rappers like Lil Wayne, who consistently degrade women and talk about killing blacks, this gives black youth the impression that this is what it takes to be successful. While one might quarrel with some of Watkins conclusions, the fundamental point here is that merely because the artist is Black does not mean they are not capable of perpetuating racialized stereotypes and the degradation of women and children.

When Hip Hop went from PRT putting out tracks like “Gods, Earth and 85ers,” with the chorus inspiring their listeners that, “knowledge is worth more than diamonds” to the lyrics of Dre, 50 Cent and Lil Wayne it is not hard to see that a change had occurred.¹⁸⁴ Looking back to the argument Cornel West made about the impact of materialism and market forces on the erosion of Black leadership, in many ways this applies to hip hop as well. Hip Hop was created to be an outlet for Black oral and spatial/physical resistance to oppressive conditions, but the oversaturation of

¹⁸⁴ “Gods, Earths and 85ers,” actually came out in 1996, yet the PRT had been putting out conscious Hip Hop tracks consistently since 1989. The point is these type of lyrics can be found on every PRT album.

commercialized mainstream Gangster Rap in the early 90s and in some sense today acts in a small way as “the marketing arm of the Prison Industrial Complex” (PIC).¹⁸⁵ That might be a bit hyperbolic, yet it is not as far-fetched as it might seem to some and it was not the result of some meeting or conspiracy theory. To make it clear, there is a specific time period roughly from 1992 to 2005, that Gangster Rap produced by large corporations was able to dominate the airwaves. The proliferation of mass communication in the twenty first century, particularly the growth of the internet has enabled listeners today to gain access to a more diversified catalogue of Hip Hop, which in turn enables a more equal image of blackness in rap.

The biggest problem with Gangster Rap in the late 90’s and early 2000s is the same problem Black film had in the 70s, it was not the violent or sexual content by itself that was the issue, it was that the only representations of blackness it allowed were stereotyped, one-dimensional and inauthentic. This was not a coincidence and I would say that it happens to be the result of centuries of racist oppression and stereotyping along with the hegemonic power of the state to implement a racialized agenda of social control. The war on Black Power and the ability of agents of the state to neutralize and disunify the ghetto became scars that remain infected with the venom of hate and contempt. The disruption of the Black Liberation Movement enabled materialism to overtake the compassion and love shown during the Civil Rights Era. This is not only affecting Black communities, capitalism’s vociferous promotion of profit over people has greatly diminished the moral fibre of most Americans. Gang and drug culture has been

¹⁸⁵ “Hip Hop Does Not Enhance Society It Degrades It?”, *Google Plus Versus Debates*, 2012. This debate can be viewed at the Versus Debate Youtube Channel at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r3-7Y0xG89Q>. This quote is from Tony Sewell who is arguing that mainstream Hip Hop is degrading Black culture.

able to flourish in inner city ghettos, many within the Black community see this as a verification of their suspicions that white society is “out to get them,” and/or keep them in their place (i.e. the ghetto).¹⁸⁶

It may be inconceivable for some that Blacks themselves would be complicit in their own perpetuation of stereotypes and racist imagery, yet this is not the first time in history this has happened. As with the “real” minstrel shows of Walker and Williams in the late nineteenth century, these actors knew very well they were playing stereotyped roles. They also knew these were the only roles open to them so they took it as an opportunity to bring some dignity and humanity to perverted and intentionally demeaning roles. The difference between these actors and the “actors” who call themselves mainstream rappers today, is that today we have a global news and pop-culture that provides 24/7 images and sounds continuously pushing these stereotypes to the extreme. Hip Hop artist MC Juice after competing in a rap battle in LA, did a freestyle for Sway and Tech on *The Wake Up Show*. In this freestyle rap he reiterates the reality of how “authentic” most gangster rappers so called, “truth” is, he raps that:

It's all the same the Willy Wack, the unoriginal, got the whole world like believing yall some criminals, before the record deals they was broke and you can check it, cause true players don't got time for making records or no videos, they too busy hustling in the zone and if you got so much loot put out your records on your own.¹⁸⁷

These lyrics by Juice bring up one fundamental issue with gangster rap/rappers, that is the idea of “realness,” or authenticity. Just how real are gangster rappers? Well

¹⁸⁶ Alexander, *New Jim Crow*, 5-6. Also see the foreword to Gary Webb, *Dark Alliance*, by Maxine Walters.

¹⁸⁷ Mc Juice, “Wake Up Show Freestyle, Pt. 2,” *Sway and Tech: Wake Up Show Freestyles*, vol. 4 (Nu Gruv Alliance/808 Records, 2001).

consider what Juice is saying, “before the record deal they was broke,” and “if you had so much loot put out your records on your own”. If these so called gangster rappers were really as “real” of a gangster as they say they are, then why would they need to rely on white record label executives or distribution networks to put out their records?. Why would they need to rent the cars, cribs, jewelry and pay the female actresses in their videos, if they were truly as empowered as their gangster aesthetic makes them seem.¹⁸⁸ Take for instance, the dichotomous actions of Suge Knight, who was executive at Death Row Records, who, according to Benjamin Bowser, acted like a complete “thug when dealing with everyone in the business [mostly his black subordinates] but a perfect gentleman when his [white] Interscope corporate sponsors visited”.¹⁸⁹ Surely a man as gangster as Suge would not capitulate to white corporate overlords, right?.

As Benjamin Bowser and Nelson George both make clear, the idea that “Hip Hop is created, owned, controlled and consumed solely by African Americans... is an appealing origin story, but it is a myth...,” since 1981 whites have been in control.¹⁹⁰ Bowser brings up the prominent rap figures of Jay-Z, 50 Cent, Russell Simmons and P Diddy all of whom, he states, are similar to Black “buppies,” who “had influence only as the employees of the corporate decision makers..., [these figures] do not control the rap business today, despite the hype surrounding them”.¹⁹¹ The corporations that control the distribution and identity of commercial rap are the heads of MCA, Warner, Capitol-EMI, Universal, Sony and BMG Music, these are the gatekeepers. The other big myth in

¹⁸⁸ Thomas R. Britt, “The Mobile Hood: Realness and the Rules of the Game,” in *Habitus of the Hood*, ed. by Chris Richardson, Hans Arthur Skott-Myhre, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 217.

¹⁸⁹ Bowser, *Gangster Rap*, 83.

¹⁹⁰ Nelson George, *Hip Hop America* (New York: Viking, 1998), 57. Also See Bowser, *Gangster Rap*, 81.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

Hip Hop is that it is consumed primarily by Blacks, because it is a music that is fundamental in voicing the marginalized experience of Blacks in America.

Well it is true, Hip Hop was created as a way to give a voice to the voiceless and allow for Blacks to infuse all of the oral traditions from Caribbean, Cajun and African musical forms into a revolutionary rhetoric that could be used to both Move the Crowd/entertain (MC) and to promote awareness and intellectual responses to oppressive socio-economic conditions. This is all true, yet the myth is that Blacks were not the main consumers of Hip Hop, although they were the actualizers, whites actually are the larger purchasers of Hip Hop in America. This is not an uncontested fact, Tricia Rose argues that it is true based on SoundScan data and demographics, yet this data is always changing. The truth, simply by population, is that Whites outnumber blacks 10 to 1 and as Bowser points out that General Social Survey (GSS) data shows that 8.2 percent of black respondents liked rap, while only 2.1 percent of white responders liked rap, yet this still “represents more people in the general population”.¹⁹² The main point is that rap is not being sold by Blacks to Blacks, it is actually more and just as likely being marketed to whites. Bakari Kitwana argues in his book *The Hip Hop Generation* that all those who grew up exposed to Hip Hop will more likely to grow up to be liberal and more progressive towards non-whites and minority groups. Bowser while agreeing that this may be somewhat true, does not believe that simply listening to Hip Hop will make whites more tolerant of race, he highlights how these are the “young white men who now call blacks ‘niggers’ and excuse the usage by pointing to gangster rappers”.¹⁹³ He contends that, “this is no different from prior generations of young white people who

¹⁹² Bowser, *Gangster Rap*, 91-5. Also see Rose, *Black Noise*, 7.

¹⁹³ *Ibid*, 92.

became fascinated by blues, ragtime, the foxtrot, swing and rhythm and blues...., there is no evidence they will become harbingers of more tolerant race relations tomorrow".¹⁹⁴

In fact, because of the corporate takeover and the proliferation of the gangster and player mentalities, Gangster Rap today which Zoe Spencer refers to as "counterfeit Hip Hop," reflects the replication of original stereotypical constructions of race that served to provide support for the exploitation and oppression of African American people".¹⁹⁵ Spencer sees this as a clear deviation from the original Hip Hop that was meant to empower and expose, rather than exploit. She states that:

No longer do the elite need to put White actors in 'Blackface'...., in order to maintain the perceived integrity of the 'new authentication' of ruling class ideas of 'blackness...., contemporary fallacies of universal racial inferiority and criminality are being promoted.., it is detrimental because it represents the artist's conscious and arrogant ownership of the constructs as identifications and representations of not only his or her self and/or experience, but as a universal identification and representation of the experience of the race and the inner city.¹⁹⁶

The problem here is not so much then the black audience but, the way in which the image of blackness is being disseminated through pop-culture. The counter argument is that words have different meanings and Hip Hop is packed full of metaphors, similes, double entendres, signifying and so many other literary tools, to the point that many words do not mean what they may seem to. For instance, some people argue that in Jay-Z's song "99 Problems," which chorus goes "if you got girl problems i feel bad for you son, I got 99 problems but a bitch ain't one", the word "bitch," is actually

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ Spencer, *Murda & Misogyny*, 100.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

referring to a police canine as the “bitch”. In the music video he is actually being chased by the police and this is more likely the meaning of the word when one studies the full lyrics.

The problem is that this music is being marketed to adolescent youth, who may or may not have the critical skills to differentiate these meanings. One interesting point here, whether true or not, is that Jay-Z after the birth of his daughter swore he would never call a woman a bitch again in his music.¹⁹⁷ That may seem like a good thing, but Jay-Z was only willing to stop using the derogatory term after, not before he got rich, and this points to the pressure forced upon young unemployed artists who do not have the money or power to stop using a single word in their music, which would hurt their chance of being signed by a major label. Thus, a quote from Melvin Van Peebles is just as insightful for Gangster Rap as it was for Black film, “the deeper into the ghetto the story is set and the lower down on the economic scale the more likely the film [or music] is to be financed”.¹⁹⁸ Artists like 50 Cent, Lil Wayne and Dre did not rise because they were the most lyrical and because they were the most talented (Dre did become a rather good producer), they were able to find successes because their images were the “hardest”. 50 Cent got shot 9 times prior to getting signed and many argue this is the primary reason he was successful, Dre beat up D. Barnes and rapped about how gangster he was (even though Eazy E called him out and twisted Dre’s lyrics calling him a She-thang instead of a G-thang) which promoted his image of gangster. So the fact is that record labels realized how profitable these gangster themes and ghetto life could be and that is why gangster rap came to dominate music culture around the turn of the

¹⁹⁷ Lisa Belkin, “Jay-Z Says He Won’t Call Us Bitches No More,” *Huffington Post*, January 17, 2012.

¹⁹⁸ Van Peebles, *Classified X*.

millennia. At least that is what record execs and labels want you to believe, the reality is a bit more malevolent.

Sales and data that analyzes lyrics and content do not align with the assumption that gangster rap sells more because it contains sex and violence. This is actually another Hip Hop myth perpetuated by scholars and corporations, who come to accept the dominant narratives and explanations for why such monotonous lyrics and messages were allowed to dominate the airwaves of the late 90's. Edward G. Armstrong points out that from 1987 to 1993, 22 percent of gangster lyrics contained violent and misogynistic references, but had increased to 78 percent by 2000.¹⁹⁹ All of the albums analyzed prior to 1993 sold and made the industry plenty of money. Also take Lauryn Hill's *the Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* (1998), this was one of the most profitable records of the year and sold more than any other female artists in its first week (crushing the sales of all gangster rap artists at the time). Hill's album contained the exact opposite of "hard" lyrics and her album sold extremely well, so it is not the lyrics itself that sells. Bowser also points to the fact that "Dre and Snoop sold more than groups such as the Geto Boys, who had much harder lyrics", this was not due to harder or more gangster lyrics or images, it has to do with the amount of money labels are willing to use to promote the albums and artists.²⁰⁰ The fact is that Public Enemy and/or later artists like Talib Kweli sold well to a racially mixed audience and proved that "the more controversial Public Enemy [or Kweli] became, the more records the group

¹⁹⁹ Edward G. Armstrong, "Gangster Misogyny: A Content Analysis of the Portrayals of Violence Against Women", 1987-1993. *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture*, 8, 106.

²⁰⁰ Bowser, *Gangster Rap*, 63. Also see Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*, (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1994), 6-14.

sold”.²⁰¹ It cannot be then, that gangsterism, sex and violence are necessary to sell rap music, in fact Bowser argues the opposite is true.

If sex, violence and being “hard” are not necessary to sell rap, then why did corporate record companies only seem to promote the gangster image so prolifically by the late 90’s if it was not needed to sell the music? I will give a few examples to extrapolate why I believe this has just as much to do with social control through the maintenance of cultural hegemony, racial hierarchy and white domination, then it does with simple capital gain. I am not contending this was always intentional and/or conscious acts, in many times these were simply reiterations of dominant cultural and political narratives. The examples of the Interscope censorship of Young Buck’s “F%^& The Police/Dead or Alive” song, the pressure from Rap-A-Lot Records to increase the hardness of the Geto Boys music and the impact of the Censorship Frame can better help to identify why commercial rap music promotes and constructs certain themes and representations or in most cases misrepresentations.

In March 2007, Young Buck gave an interview on *The Hot 97 Radio Show* to discuss his upcoming album *Buck the World*. In this interview Angie Martinez, the host of *Hot 97*, asked about a recent video of Young Buck’s song “F&*% The Police/ Dead and Alive” which was released on Youtube as an independent track. Young Buck responds and makes an interesting revelation, he explains how Jimmy Iovine and the “lyric committee” at Interscope Records would not allow this song to be released on his album. Young Buck states that, “They wouldn’t let me put that song on my album, they

²⁰¹ *Ibid*, 72.

said it was too violent, Interscope, they blamed it on the ‘lyric committee’”.²⁰² Now that may seem like no big deal, the song is pretty violent, yet let’s put this in perspective. Take a look at some of the lyrics from the other songs on the album and you will see that there is another reason other than violence why this song was kept off the album. Just take a second and look at the lyrics from the songs “Buss Yo Head” and “Hold On” (feat 50 Cent) are these lyrics not violent:

cause when i see you niggas on the street, the barrel of the beretta knockout a muthaf&^a’s teeth, just know there will never be peace this glock will make sure you never sell a cd [and] I hit your heart you dead, I squeeze till the semi run out, niggas know me good, in my hood, call me a dumb out I’m the nigga in the hooptie with my hat down low, can’t tell that this a hit, until the MAC-10 blow I got 32 shots, I ain’t got to aim I’ll wave this bitch in your direction man (Ha-ha).²⁰³

What immediately strikes me from this comparison is that it is not violence that got the song censored it was the type of violence it depicted. To put it bluntly, the record company was not okay with one song that talked about police violence and cop killing, but it was fine to market 15 other songs that were packed full of black on black violence.

The Geto Boys provide a glimpse into how this “censorship” even further marginalize political messages and pressures gangster rappers to become even “harder”. It first should be noted that the Geto Boys were produced by J-Prince who owned Rap-A-Lot records a black owned record label, but the parent company of the label is Sony and the albums were distributed by EMI. The Geto Boys, as mentioned above, were one of the hardest rap groups and laid the foundation for southern hip hop,

²⁰² This quote was taken from: Young Buck, *Interview on Hot 97*, March 2007. his album *Buck the World* was released in the same month.

²⁰³ Both of these songs were released on the album Young Buck, *Buck The World*, Interscope Records, 2007.

yet they did not reach the success of Dre and Snoop. The Geto Boys was originally called the Geto Boys, the name change came when J-Prince pushed the group to embrace a more hardcore style. Group member Johnny-C explains that, “the company gave us guns,” and when they asked him to use more profanity and demeaning language in his lyrics he refused and was replaced by Willie D.²⁰⁴ J-Prince wanted more songs like one of their original songs, *Assassins*, a song that is all about murder and violence. He even pushed the group to provide a photoshoot for an album cover, the day after one member Bushwick Bill attempted suicide, on a hospital gurney. All of this was to provide a “harder” image for the label to market. The Geto Boys were highly regarded in rap circles for their innovative southern style of rap and they claim the major difference between their music and most other gangster rap, is that they are not attempting to glorify the murder and violence they are simply reiterating their reality, this may be true, although Ready Red did leave the group because he did not want to continue rapping about killing young blacks.

Christopher J. Schneider has written about the “Censorship Frame”, basically arguing that the media and pop-culture critics who demonize young Blacks and rap music combine to work with policymakers to construct a criminal image of blackness. The demonization of rap music/artists in the media between the 1980s and the present, (a criticism that is not launched towards rock and metal bands who are just as violent, misogynistic and sexual), and the disproportionate representation of Black criminality in the news, both according to Schneider, combine to reinforce dominant cultural

²⁰⁴ “The Unsung Story of the Geto Boys,” *TV One’s Unsung*, 2013.

narratives and maintain social control.²⁰⁵ Thus, the ways in which American society demonizes Gangster Rap, but not others forms of pop-culture that are just as violent, and the way in which the media makes it seem as if every Black man is a criminal, affectively condition American society to accept a pre constructed view of blackness that is neither authentic nor factual. This is not to say that popular cultural discourses can not work in dichotomous ways allowing for them to contain various functionalities. Craig Watkins discusses how media representations and themes can both help to give a “voice to [black urban youth and] their ideas about ghetto dislocation,” and the can also work to construct a stereotyped image of black life and “treat inner city blight-- violent crime, familial disorganization, and drug and welfare dependency, as the core experience [and representation] of black America”.²⁰⁶ Certainly if media and pop-cultural forces have the power to demean and demonize it also has the power to uplift and expose people to new ideas and cultures.

Hood Films emerged in the early 1990s with films like *New Jack City* (1991) and *Boyz in the Hood* (1991), followed by *Menace II Society* in (1993) and numerous other less successful releases. These films sought to incorporate Gangster Rap, (usually including rappers in the films, e.g., MC Eiht in *Menace* and Ice Cube in *Boyz*) into a “new” film genre that sought to visualize the socio-economic conditions of post-industrial ghetto life. Many of the arguments I have made about Gangster Rap and Blaxploitation apply to Hood Films as well. In fact, the Hood Film was simply another reiteration of the

²⁰⁵ Christopher J. Schneider, “Culture, Rap Music, “Bitch,” and the Development of the Censorship Frame”, *American Behavioral Scientist*, 55 (1), 36-56. Also see the “Introduction” to *Commodified and Criminalized: New Racism and African Americans in Contemporary Sports*, ed. David J. Leonard and C. Richard King, Rowman and Littlefield: New York, 2011), 4-5, for an explanation of how news and sports media acts as a “hyper-surveillance mechanism” and how Black sports athletes are continuously “marked as other,” and “confined to a state of hyper criminalization and commodification”.

²⁰⁶ Watkins, *Representing*, 198, 170 & 174-6.

“ghettocentric-action flick”. Watkins identifies how Hollywood’s production of hood films, “invokes the spectre of seventies blaxploitation by sharply reproducing the black cinema/white profit formula..., the studios enforced extremely low budgets, limited distribution and inexpensive marketing generally linked to rap music”.²⁰⁷ Hollywood could then appropriate urban black life at a relatively low cost.

It may seem like this section is attempting to promote the idea that Gangster Rap, Hood Films and Blaxploitation Films should not be allowed or should be censored. Quite to the contrary, some of my favorite songs and films come from these genres, I see an important place in pop-culture for all of these cultural and social visualization and presentations of American society. The biggest problem is the oversaturation and ghettofication of black life and the exclusion or marginalization of all other representations of blackness. Watkins identifies how many black scholars and filmmakers have lodged complaints of racism in Hollywood by asking the question, “given the complexity of black American life why would Hollywood limit its representation of blacks to films that glorified youth violence, gang culture and antisocial behavior?”²⁰⁸ He does not believe this is a conscious effort to degrade blacks and sees a change in pop-culture youth markets, the rise of Hip Hop and the political imagination of the postindustrial ghetto as the factors that lead to this outcome. I am not so convinced and believe that when examined through the lense of dominant cultural narratives, the “Censorship Frame” and the maintenance of racial hierarchies and social control, it becomes clear that even if not intentional these pop-culture and media narratives pre construct the Black image to fit the dominant white framework of the time.

²⁰⁷ Watkins, *Representing*, 189.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 171.

Similar to the way social conservatives in the 1960s would blame Black inferiority on black pathology, rather than on institutionalized and systemic racism, politicians and policymakers in the 90's could blame inner city poverty on "ghetto culture" and the degradation of Black cultural value systems. The proliferation of gangster and player mentalities that dominated mainstream Black films, music and culture at this time all seemed to conform to and reinforce conservative narratives about Black life. Jeanette Covington believes that this is why so many whites came to believe in post-racialist notions that Blacks were now being given an equal chance to succeed, as "black social disadvantage was now seen as the result of 'ghetto culture'-- and not white oppression-- [this] meant the end of white guilt and thereby any lingering white sympathy for the economic plight of blacks".²⁰⁹

California Governor Pete Wilson's response to the release of *Boyz In The Hood*, exemplifies this conservative reactionary deflection tactic of putting the blame on the community rather than the joblessness, homelessness, drugs and lack of social services that plague these neighborhoods. It must be first noted that the 1992 Los Angeles riot, as with most other riots of the time, was the result of oppressive conditions (most notably police brutality). The 1992 riot erupted after Black outrage to the acquittal of four white police officers involved in the brutal beating of Rodney King. In response to the riot, California right-wing politicians "campaign[ed] on the need for more police, more prisons and tougher punishment".²¹⁰ The fueling of white fears by ignorant reactionary

²⁰⁹ Covington, *Crime and Racial Constructions*, 54. Also see Watkins, *Representing*, 176 & 218-20.

²¹⁰ Covington, *Crime and Racial Constructions*, 66. Also see Cathleen Decker, "Watts Riots Shifted State to the Right, But New Demographics Pushed it Left", *Los Angeles Times*, August 5, 2015. Many have wrongfully associated the 1992 LA riot with Blacks alone, even though all races were involved in the riot.

politics and the labeling of inner city minority communities as “underclass” enabled the re-emergence and reconditioning of neo-paternalistic arguments of racial inferiority.

Boyz in the Hood was one of the original hood films and tells the story of three friends growing up in South Central. The film is brilliant and is filled with social commentary that presents the harsh reality of street life within inner cities across America. *Boyz* had made \$42 million in box office sales in its first five weeks and grossed over \$60 million by 1992, in perspective Columbia only put up \$6 million to make the film. One point relevant here is, the film showed just as well in suburban communities as it did in the inner-cities proving, that whites furnished a large crossover audience for the film. The film actually has a very touching and inspiring message, that violence doesn't really get you anywhere and as Doughboy (Ice Cube) relates after getting revenge for the killing of Ricky, he doesn't feel better, he doesn't really feel anything and he reflects on the hopelessness with the increased marginalization of Black existence. The hood films that came after *Boyz*, all seemed to be trying to recreate the aesthetics of this revolutionary film, yet most did not provide the substance nor the inner dialogue that allowed for this type of reflection.

The film is not glorifying the violence, drugs and gangs it depicts, the film even ends

with the phrase, “increase the peace,” showcasing that the point of the film is to expose the disadvantages and oppressive conditions in these communities. For conservatives, who were only willing to take away what they wanted, and only viewed these films as cementing their racialized beliefs, these became symbols that seemed to prove their racialized assumptions. Pete Wilson urged white Californians to view *Boyz* in an interview on the May 3, 1993 episode of *This Week with David Brinkley*, not to educate themselves on the issues of the inner city, but to confirm white fears and anxieties of Black inferiority. In doing this Wilson, “managed to direct white anger and fear at the ghetto culture of poverty and at black women in the ghettos, who raised their sons alone”.²¹¹ The violence and gangs of the ghettos were then the result of fatherless homes and black cultural practices rather than because of disadvantages in housing, schools, employment opportunities and a lack of social services. Utilizing white fears, Wilson and other conservative politicians were able to consistently win elections and implement “law and order” policies that have led California through an exponential growth in prisons and prison populations.²¹² A further discussion of crime, prisons and policies will come below, for now it must be understood that most of the growth in prisons and crime rates in modern times is not the result of an increase in crime but in an increase in policing.

Of course conservatives tended to ignore the simple facts that the Kerner Commission established in the late 60s, which is that it is not black culture, but the

²¹¹ Conservative California Governor Pete Wilson appeared on *This Week with David Brinkley*, May 3, 1992 to urge voters to support his ‘law and order’ policies in response to the 1992 LA riot and the release of *Boyz*. Also see Covington, *Crime and Racial Constructions*, 67.

²¹² *Ibid.* Also see Dipannita Basu, *Hip Hop: Cultural Clout, Corporate Control and the ‘Carceral Cast,’* in *The Vinyl Aint Final: Hip Hop And the Globalization of Black Culture* (Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2006), 28-9, and Covington, *Crime and Racial Constructions*, 67.

socio-economic conditions of these communities that leads to violence, drugs and gangs. As mentioned above, many whites fled inner-cities following the loss of industry and factory jobs across America. Jobs that did not go overseas, usually followed whites to the suburbs. Julius Wilson argues that “joblessness skyrocketed in black ghettos, as white working men suburbanized in the 60s and 70s manufacturing jobs suburbanized with them”.²¹³ Chicago lost 60% of industrial jobs by 1987, Philadelphia lost 64%, New York 58%, Detroit 51% and these numbers are similar in almost every major American city. Juliet Schor argues that one of the biggest issues with the post-industrial American economy is that it is increasingly unable to provide work for some segments of the population, resulting in an increase in hours for some and an “overproduction of idleness for others”²¹⁴ She highlights how meaningful opportunities for poor, inner city youth have disappeared and the lack of funding for social services, community programs, job training and employment programs elevates a sense of hopelessness within inner city minority communities.

Jeanette Covington also points out that what further exacerbates this problem was the loss of black middle-class families who fled the inner-city around the same time jobs and whites did, leaving only the poorest of the poor who could not afford to move. By 1990, 44% of African American youth lived in poverty, while 38% of Latino and only 11% of white youth experienced a similar economic reality.²¹⁵ Two factors, (although there are many other factors as well, but these will suffice here), that played a large role

²¹³This quote is seen in Covington, *Crime and Racial Constructions*, 55, but she is quoting from: William Julius Wilson, *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996).

²¹⁴ Juliet B. Schor, *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure*, (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 39-41.

²¹⁵ Watkins, *Representing*, 56.

in the decrease in employment were: loss of informal job networks and racial discrimination in hiring. As the Black middle-class and industrial jobs fled out of the ghetto, informal job networks (which were one of the main ways in which Black found work, by referrals), with no ability to get a referral from Blacks, many white workers did not want to hire Blacks especially if they were from the inner-city (some employers feared that gang culture and violence might come with them into the job). Many employers refused to advertise in inner-city and city wide newspapers, which is the primary place Blacks could look for job opportunities at this time.²¹⁶ Thus, not only were jobs less abundant by the 90s, they were also located in communities that were inaccessible for most Blacks.

This is what must be first discussed when one wants to point the finger at Black youth and/or ghetto culture, the conditions discussed above foster a sense of hopelessness and entrapment, which further escalates the “nihilistic threat” within these communities. Hood films can help to explain this sense of nihilism as exemplified by O’ Dog in *Menace II Society* and the sense of hopelessness that comes with a loss of industry and the rise of gang and drug culture as seen in *Original Gangstas* (1996).

Original Gangstas is what some might call a neo-Blaxploitation hood film and it has many similar characteristics to both genres. Fred Williamson produced the film and brought the idea to Larry Cohen who directed it. *Gangstas* was set and filmed in the city of Gary, Indiana and featured an all star cast with Pam Grier, Richard Roundtree, Jim Brown, Dru Down, Ron O’ Neal and Shyheim from Wu Tang Clan as the “Word Man”.

²¹⁶ This is recounted in Covington, *Crime and Racial Constructions*, 57, but again she is analysing data and survey statistics collected by Wilson in *When Work Disappears*.

The film is about the steel town of Gary that was able to establish a large black middle class population by the mid 50s. The opening narration explains that, “it was damn hard work but people raised their families well”, but in the late 70s:

without warning US Steel shut down 70% of the mill, at first the workers thought it was temporary but it wasn't. Their savings went, unemployment ran out and slowly the former steel workers lost the last two things they had left, their pride and they hope.²¹⁷

The film openly implies the loss of industrial jobs and lack of meaningful employment allowed gang activity to fill the economic void left within the inner city.

Gary, now has one of the highest murder rates in America according to the film and is controlled by three rival gangs (Rebels, Rangers and Diablos) that maintain an uneasy truce in order to keep their absolute power over the communities and the various drug trades they control. The Rebels, Diablos and Rangers all control a section of the city (their turf), and enforce the right to victimize the peoples residing in their respective communities. The main characters, John Bookman (Fred Williamson) and Laurie Thompson (Pam Grier), are reunited when Williamson returns to Gary after his father is shot. His father was actually shot by the Rebels, a gang he had helped found years before, and was shot because he “snitched” on the Rebels for killing Kenny Thompson (Grier's son). The Rebels demand absolute respect and power from the community, extorting businesses, intimidating police and killing anyone who disrespects and challenges their authority. Kenny Thompson was killed in broad daylight in a drive by shooting because he hustled the Rebels in a Basketball game for \$300, Thompson

²¹⁷ Opening narration from Larry Cohen, *Original Gangstas*, Po Boy Productions, 1996.

had just received a Basketball scholarship from UCLA and was just about to leave “the hood” when he is killed.

No doubt the film is trying to relate that even those who resist gang life, and do not succumb to the temptations of quick money when living in poverty, are many times still victimized nonetheless. It also seeks to convey that gangs grew out of the hopelessness of unemployment and a loss of Black middle class families, where “old heads” could give examples of successful Black men who could take pride in their ability to fully provide for their families. The “old heads” are older generation of blacks that preach hard work and represent assimilation to a generation of Black youth that feel they do not have the same access to meaningful jobs or futures within mainstream American society, this is rightfully so in most cases. The film even uses an abandoned steel factory as the hangout for the Diablos gang, this subtly implies that gangs now provide the economic opportunities that the Mill, they now occupy, once did.

Gary, Indiana is the poster child for many post-industrial cities, it can be seen as a microcosm for the impacts of de-industrialization and racially induced politics on urban minority communities. Gary was founded by Carnegie Illinois Steel in 1906 and had a history of racial exclusions and discrimination against Black workers and migrants, by the time of the Great Migration around the late 1920's blacks began to make up a large portion of the steel workers in the city. In the 1960's, Gary was one of the economic hubs of the Midwest boasting a population of over 175,000, according to the *Stats Indiana* by 1990 the population dropped to 100,000 and in 2010 it stands at around

80,000 people, 85% of which are black.²¹⁸ Gary has been labeled as a post-industrial American ghost town and much of the cities landmarks (such as the Palace Theatre and Memorial Auditorium), schools (Emerson Middle and Hector Mann High School and over a dozen others), transportation hubs (Train Stations, Airport) and churches (Gary Methodist) all lay in crumbling ruins. To understand why this happened we must understand how white society reacted once the city became predominantly Black.

In 1967, Gary elected its first Black mayor Richard Hatcher, who was an ardent supporter of the Civil Rights Movement. Some former Gary residence, including Vernon Smith an Indiana State Representative, believe that whites saw the election of Hatcher as a Black takeover of the politics of Gary, they responded by “taking the economic lifeblood out of your community”.²¹⁹ Ruth Needleman describes how the reaction of whites to the election of Hatcher, “was ‘white flight’ to the suburbs”.²²⁰ Whites fled in droves by the 1970’s and the black middle-class soon followed to the suburban communities of Crown Point and Schererville who both quickly began to thrive. Racially charged politics worked to tarnish the name of Gary and limit its government funding and restructure zoning laws to further benefit these suburban communities at the expense of Gary. Merrillville is a great example of how a section of Gary that was rezoned and repurposed to make way for another suburb that built a massive shopping mall on the outskirts of the town was further drawing businesses and middle class

²¹⁸ *Stats Indiana*, “Indiana City/Town Census Counts”, 1900-2010, Accessed from http://www.stats.indiana.edu/population/PopTotals/historic_counts_cities.asp.

²¹⁹ Vernon Smith quoted from Sandra L. Barnes, “A Tale of Two Cities”, *Cinematic Focus*, distributed by Vanderbilt University.

²²⁰ Ruth Needleman, “Gary Indiana: A Disaster Model for Redevelopment”, *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology*, vol. 15, iss. 1-2, 2016, 119.

residence out of Gary.²²¹ Needleman refers to the neglect, racialized ignorance and Gary's bad reputation as a concerted effort on the part of white society to "drive out the Negro".²²² She does not see this as exclusive to the Midwest and explains how Ferguson, Detroit, Chicago and most other post-industrial cities shared the same fate.

As chances for social mobility evaporated and the ability for inner city residents to provide for their families were diminished the lack of pride and trust, in the "old head" philosophy of working hard to obtain success, withered away. Marvin Bookman while recovering from being shot by the Rebels, reflects on the growth of hopelessness and nihilism within black youth as he discussed the fact that all of his friends are now unemployed and some even homeless. He laments that, "People work all their lives and wind up sleeping in a cardboard box in a doorway. It's no wonder why these kids today don't wanna work, they don't even wanna live to grow old". This is the sad reality many Black youth experience and when this is combined and viewed through the lense of the "Censorship Frame," where Black life is constantly being blamed for the "ghetto culture" ravaging inner cities, one can understand how Black life is being and/or is seeming to be devalued within mainstream pop-culture and media representations. These factors enable the prevalence of nihilism to come to pervade within the psyche of inner city youth. Mumia Abu Jamal in his essay *Homeland and Hip Hop*, identifies this bitter truth; that many Blacks have come to the conclusion that white society does not care about them and that, as suggested by the Kerner Commission fifty years before, that:

²²¹ Barnes, *A Tale of Two Cities*, Also see the documentary *Stagnant Hope: Gary Indiana* by Alex J. Semchuk, 2014 to get a full view of the destruction and loss of economic viability within Gary.

²²² Needleman, "Model for Redevelopment", 2016.

there are, at the very least, two worlds in America one of the well to do and one of the struggling, The music [Hip Hop] arises from a generation that feels (with some justice) that they have been betrayed by those who came before them, that they are at best tolerated in schools, feared on the streets and almost inevitably destined for the hellholes of prison. They grew up hungry, hated and unloved, and this is the psychic fuel that generates the anger that seems endemic in much of the music and poetry. One senses very little hope, above the personal goals of wealth, to climb above the pit of poverty.²²³

No figure represents this nihilistic mentality better than O' Dog from *Menace II Society*, Caine explains early in the film how O' Dog is "America's worst nightmare: young, Black and didnt give a fuck".²²⁴ *Menace* is a story of young black males and their struggles growing up in Watts (a district of southern LA), California. The film centres around Caine and his homies, Shareef, Stacy and O' Dog who is Caines best friend and has a reputation for being a stone cold killer. O' Dog visually represents the growing lack of faith, hope and nihilism that has taken over many of these communities. He openly rejects the "old heads" religious base that allowed for such unity and optimism in the past, but which is not seen by new generation of blacks. Caine's grandfather (who raises Caine because his dad got killed in a drug deal and his mom was "too strung out"), sits Caine and O down and explains how they cannot keep killing because it is against christianity, he states "the bible teaches thou shalt not kill", Dog responds by stating that, "god doesn't care about black people, or else why would he put us in such a fucked up place". The "old head" believes that faith and hard work can overcome any

²²³ Mumia Abu Jamal, "Homeland and Hip Hop", in *The Vinyl Aint Final: Hip Hop and the Globalization of Black Popular Culture*, ed. Dipannita Basu and Sidney J. Lemelle, (Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2006), 25-6.

²²⁴ This quote is given by Caine in the early part of Albert and Allen Hughes, *Menace II Society*, New Line Cinema, 1993. This quote can often be found within the lyrics of Hip Hop artists, Rass Kass, Spice 1 and Jus Allah all have songs and/or entire albums titled: "Amerikkka's Nightmare" or "Young, Black and Dont Give a Fuck".

obstacle, Caine and O, however do not see faith as being able to save them from the socio-economic plight of urban ghetto life.²²⁵ Awak represents the true role model Caine and O' Dog look up to, he as Caine explains, "is a 'G' (gangster), he had been putting in work (committing crimes) for so long he just liked to see other people do dirt".

Menace also helps to articulate the way in which the social and political activism became unpopular and unhelpful in the new generation and how individualistic pursuits overcame the unity that was so powerful just decades before. Two scenes illustrate these points perfectly. As Cain goes to pick up his new car with Stacy and Shareef, Shareef who is representative of a black muslim nationalist asks Stacy to play his cassette. Stacy responds to this gesture by laughing and saying "you better go somewhere with that Black Power shit, you know that shit gets no play in this ride". Shareef is the only new generation figure in the whole movie to embrace Black Power ideologies and he is consistently made fun of and laughed at because of it. Right after Caine buys his new car he realizes he needs rims and a stereo for his new car, fortunately for him another Black male drives up beside him with nice rims and a 'banging' stereo. Caine follows him and robs him in a fast food drive thru, while he has his gun to the other Black man's head, the victim states, "come on man we supposed to be brothers," Caine again laughs at such a notion and responds "you trying to get smart, you trying to kick some knowledge, fuck that". Caine and O' Dog's responses and actions exemplify, as Bakari Kitwana would call, "the Hip Hop Generations" retreat from

²²⁵ Watkins, *Representing*, 205 and Elijah Anderson, "Some Observations of Black Youth Employment," *In Youth Employment and Public Policy*, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hill, 1980), 64 -87, argue that "Due mainly to social and economic transformations in urban ghettos, the traditional "old head" figure has lost prestige and credibility as a role model. Anderson argues when gainful employment and their rewards are not forthcoming, boys easily conclude that the moral lessons of the old head concerning the work ethic, punctuality and honesty do not fit their circumstances".

more “old head” ideas such as religion, Black Power and social activism in favor of more individualistic and materialistic outlooks.

The last analyses that i think can be helpful, is taking the concepts of the gender divide and Black masculinity crisis and applying them to *Menace*. Bakari Kitwana discusses the gender divide as a decrease in the amount of strong black familial relationships due to many factors: rise of mass incarceration, misogynistic rap music, impact of patriarchy, the Black masculinity crisis and the rise of feminism.²²⁶ Watkins identifies how the hood film *Straight out of Brooklyn* (1991), portrays the “black masculinity crisis “ as the result of the father’s “failure to find meaningful work and the struggle to deal with his failed status as a patriarch,”.²²⁷ In fact, the “war between the sexes” is a byproduct of the American socio-economic condition young blacks experience. These problems are societal not pathological or cultural, Kitwana argues that:

if young black men were more likely to go to college than jail, if black men and women were employed, obtained home mortgages, earned salaries and promotions at similar rates to their white counterparts then name-calling, resentment and hostility between young black men and women would stop.²²⁸

Within *Menace* we can find that Caine exhibits the “gender divide” and, indeed, in the end it is his “player mentality” that is his undoing. Caine slyly convinces Ilena to have sex with him and then “dogs” her when she tells him she is pregnant and that, “he was the only one she was with”. When he finally realizes he loves Ronnie and decides

²²⁶ Bakari Kitwana, *Hip Hop Generation: Young Blacks and Crisis in African American Culture* (New York: Basic Civitas, 2002), 86-96. Also see Watkins, *Representing*, 218-20 and Spencer, *Murder & Mayhem*, 70-79.

²²⁷ Watkins, *Representing*, 220.

²²⁸ Kitwana, *Hip Hop Gen.*, 118-9. Also see Spencer, *Murder and Mayhem*, 70-75.

to leave the hood with her, he is shot dead in a drive-by shooting (by Ilena's cousin who "did not like the way he was dogging her") along with Shareef as they pack up to leave. *Menace* does have some insightful commentary to give, the message in the end may be a bit grim for most, as the only survivor of the story is Stacy who was one of the lucky few to get a football scholarship.

One of the most significant criticisms of *Menace* is that it did not provide enough context in explaining why the ghetto conditions apparent within the film existed in the first place. Many blame the film for portraying violence and crime as glorified and normal behavior for black youth. *Menace*, "refashions Moynihan's contention that the black family is a 'tangle of pathology and the fact that the film was made by two young African American filmmakers embolden this claim'".²²⁹ Conservatives such as George Will were quick to commend the film as "relentlessly realistic" and believed the film will "strengthen the spectator's resolve to enforce domestic tranquility". Will then begins to describe how these films also encourage violence in minority communities by citing a Chicago police commander who noted that "*Boyz in the Hood* is a training film for crime,"²³⁰ The struggle for cultural hegemony in music, TV and film is seen by many as a "culture war". Covington relates that because of *Menace*'s downplaying of the impacts of white racism on the riots and economic conditions of the ghetto, "it is law-and-order governments that win the culture war [instead of] blacks angry at racism and police".²³¹

Again I want to clarify that my belief is that it is the mainstream oversaturation with images of Black youth violence and misogyny that is the problem not the images

²²⁹ Watkins, *Representing*, 225. Also see Moynihan, *The Negro Family*.

²³⁰ George F. Will, "Menace II Society: Violence Therapy", *Washington Post*, June 17, 1993.

²³¹ Covington, *Crime and Racial*, 69-70.

themselves. When the mentalities and stereotyped images depicted in the films and music, discussed above, become the only popular cultural representations for an entire people and culture. When middle and working class representations are rejected in Hollywood and the music industry (although, many TV shows like *Family Matters* and *Fresh Prince* did make their way into popular television), in favor of repetitive images that in many ways come to resemble the very stereotypes that conservatives and white racists had been trying to perpetuate for centuries, only then does it become a problem.

The facts I want to bring then now are not meant to prove conservative assertions that these films encourage violence, even though it may seem this way. Instead, what I want to contend is that these incidents are just as much the result of white exclusion and/or the marginalization of any positive representations of blackness, as the films themselves. In January of 1994, Caryon Johnson, his cousin, and two other friends attempted to act out the scenes they had witnessed in *Menace*. They set out onto the streets of Paducah, Kentucky. The group carjacked and then repeatedly shot James Pearson to death, then shot Matthew Fiorentini twice after driving by him and his girlfriend.²³² As Robin Coleman discovered from interviewing and researching the assailants of this incident, they looked up to the figures in these films and these visual representations came to dominate their psyche. She explains, “it was in the media culture that Caryon was raised. That lacks representations of African American men that could speak to the needs, concerns and desires of youths such as Caryon”.²³³ The

²³² *Johnson vs Commonwealth, case no. 97-SC-354-MR*, Supreme Court of Kentucky,. April 16, 1998.

²³³ Robin R. Coleman, “The Menace II Society Copycat Murder Case and Thug Life: A Reception Study with a Convicted Criminal”, in *Say It Loud: African American Audiences, Media and Identity*, ed. Robin R. Coleman, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 277. Also see *Johnson vs Commonwealth*, to get a sense of how the film was associated with the case immediately and many blamed the Hughes brothers, who denied that a film could make someone commit such an act.

Black representations provided by Hollywood, “the Denzel Washington's and Danny Glover's, tend not to embody the kinds of masculine economic, educational and street respect dilemma's that are part of Caryon's world.”²³⁴

Prison Industrial Complex, Crime and Police Brutality

By far the biggest symbol of white domination in American society today is the Prison Industrial Complex and the Criminal Justice System. Recent documentaries such as *The 13th* (2016), and books from Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow* to Lisa Corrigan's *Prison Power*, and Kristian Williams *Our Enemies in Blue*, provide a stunning outline of how prisons, crime and punishment have evolved since the early 1980s. The conclusion that they all reach is that today's prisons and police are nothing more than a physical embodiment of white racial and class domination. Alexander argues that, “mass incarceration in the US emerged as a comprehensive and well disguised system of racialized social control that functions strikingly similar to Jim Crow”.²³⁵ As argued in Chapter 1, the criminalization of blackness in the Jim Crow South was meant to act as a method of reinventing slavery and reinforcing racial hierarchy. The 13th Amendment did not fully abolish slavery and slave labor, as it states “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime..., shall exist in the United States”.²³⁶

Whites could now use the label of criminal to justify oppression and forced labor for blacks, chain gangs and convict laborers took the place of slave plantations. In

²³⁴ *Ibid*, 278. Also see Celeste A. Fisher, *Black on Black: Urban Youth Films And The Multicultural Audience*, (Toronto: Scarecrow Press, 2006), 23-42, for a discussion of black and white personal reception and reactions to the film, these discussions were held with college students both male and female.

²³⁵ Alexander, *New Jim Crow*, 4.

²³⁶ *U.S. Constitution*, amend. 14, sec. 1. Also see *The 13th* by Ava Duvernay and Blackmon, *Slavery By Another Name*, for a detailed account of the perpetuation of the slave system using crime and punishment instead of slave markets as the method of procuring black labor.

modern America the reality is not much different, yet now America imprisons a quarter of the world's prison population, a disproportionate number of those people are non-white.²³⁷ Alexander recognized that the Criminal Justice System works in many ways as a perpetuation of slave and racial caste systems, while Corrigan relates how prisons have historically acted as counter subversive tools to disrupt civil and political activists. According to Alexander, the 'brand' of criminality today mimics Jim Crow, as convicts "once released are denied the right to vote, excluded from juries and relegated to a racially segregated and subordinate existence".²³⁸ Prisons and police have been and remain the physical forces that maintain racial caste systems in American society.

Just as southern conservative Democrats and white supremacists utilized violence and punitive measures to maintain forced Black labor and racial caste systems following emancipation, police brutality and the Prison Industrial Complex fulfill a very similar role today. The conservative backlash to the progress of the Civil Rights Movement and the liberal social policies of the late 60s (as discussed in Chapter 2 above), was the catalyst for the rise of mass incarceration in the US. The War on Drugs initiated under President Richard Nixon, has been singled out as one of the leading causes of mass incarceration. This is true. Increased arrests, longer sentences and shifts in police and criminal justice policies, in many ways as a response to the Drug War, have been instrumental in enabling the growth of prison populations.

What needs to be understood is that neither drugs nor an increase in crime are responsible for rising rates of incarceration in America. This is the result of policymakers

²³⁷ Glenn C. Loury, *Race, Incarceration and American Values*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2008), 5. Also see Ava Duvernay, *The 13th*, Leonard, *Crime and Power*, 9-11 and ACLU, "Prison Crisis," 2018.

²³⁸ Alexander, *New Jim Crow*, 4. Also see Ava Duvernay, *13th*.

decisions to shift from a Criminal Justice System that seeks to rehabilitate and prepare criminals for the struggles of re-entering society, to a Criminal Justice System that increasingly seeks punitive measures to respond to crime. What needs to be realized is that the cultural hegemonic forces of the media through the “Censorship Frame” condition Americans to accept increased punitive responses even when crime rates are decreasing. Glenn Loury goes on to explain that, “A handful of cases-- in which a predator does an awful thing to an innocent-- get excessive media attention and engender public outrage”.²³⁹

The War on Drugs is important for several reasons: firstly, realizing that the War on Drugs was not a response to increasing drug use rates, but a conservative effort to implement new methods of social control helps to identify what the real motivations for such a policy were. Michelle Alexander argues that the War on Drugs was not initiated as a response to a drug crises because it was not until, “A few years after the drug war was declared [that] crack began to spread in poor black neighborhood”.²⁴⁰ In fact, she argues that Reagan initiated the second War on Drugs as “media campaigns” directed at poor black inner-cities, these media representations were “saturated with images of black crack whores, dealers and babies”, all meant to sow seeds of support for increased policing and punitive responses to crime.²⁴¹ The second reason why this is very important is because many within the black community feel as if drugs, the War on

²³⁹ Glenn C. Loury, *Race, Incarceration and American Values*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2008), 10. Also see Schneider, “Rap Music and the Development of the Censorship Frame”.

²⁴⁰ Alexander, *New Jim Crow*, 5.

²⁴¹ *ibid.*

Drugs and the punitive responses to it were deliberate attempts by white society to “keep blacks in their place” and/or even to exterminate them.²⁴²

The notion of a War on Drugs being carried out with equal vigor in all parts of the country is easily refuted by the following statistics. In her 2005 book, Eileen B. Leonard utilizes statistics from the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services to provide a shocking revelation, that “although there are about 5 million whites who are regular illicit drug users, compared to 1 million blacks” blacks were still up to 50 times more likely to be arrested for drug related crimes than whites.²⁴³ Blacks make up less than 20 percent of illicit drug sellers, while whites make up more than 60 percent of those who sell drugs, yet “blacks are 12 times more likely than whites to be imprisoned for a drug offense than whites and in some states African Americans account for 80 to 90 percent of all drug offenders sent to prison”.²⁴⁴ There is no doubt that the War on Drugs has been racialized and targeted at street level dealers in poor urban minority communities. A quote from John Ehrlichman, former Assistant for Domestic Affairs to President Nixon, when discussing the initial motivations for the drug war declares what these statistics prove, that:

The Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that, had two enemies: the antiwar left and black people. You understand what I'm saying? We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those

²⁴² The National Urban League actually came to the conclusion in their 2005 “The State of Black America” report that this idea cannot be dismissed as simple conspiracy, See Clarence Page, “Talk of ‘the Plan’ is a Paranoid View of Black Problems”, *Chicago Tribune*, January 24, 1990. Also see Killah Priest’s song *Black Market*, he raps that, “fiends with their bare arms scratching, they practice the plan that the White Man crafted, to turn our people backwards, from Black hoods to Spanish Harlem, the plan is Gotham”.

²⁴³ Eileen B. Leonard, *Crime, Inequality and Power*, (New York: Routledge, 2015), 188-89.

²⁴⁴ *Human Rights Watch*, “Decades of Disparity”, March 2, 2009.

communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying? Of course we did.²⁴⁵

The drug war needs to be rightfully recognized as a social control mechanism initiated by conservative reactionaries in response to civil and political activism and the impact of increased Black Power on young Blacks. Attempting to answer the questions of why drug enforcement is focused on street dealers in poor communities and not at the large scale pushers who flood these communities could help to identify why imprisonment rates for blacks are so high. But, even if we simply take a look at the result of increases in punitive responses to drug offenses, we can see how detrimental such policies have been. Glenn Loury states that “from 1980 to 1997 the number of people incarcerated for nonviolent offenses tripled, and the number of people incarcerated for drug offenses increased by a factor of eleven”.²⁴⁶ Drug and mandatory minimum sentencing laws, along with three strike laws, zero-tolerance policies and introduced truth-in-sentencing laws, all have contributed to fueling the Prison Industrial Complex with disproportionate numbers of non-violent disadvantaged minority offenders, primarily young black males.

In 2003, Ryan King argues that, “African Americans were arrested for drug offences at a rate 238% higher than whites”.²⁴⁷ This proves that nothing has really changed in the twenty first century. Illustrating the point that police are targeting Black youth for drug crimes, Marc Mauer and David Cole argue that “police find drugs where they look for them,” and “they are looking for them in central cities, not on Wall Street,

²⁴⁵ Quote from Dan Baum, “Legalize It All: How to Win the War on Drugs”, *Harper's Magazine*, April, 2016.

²⁴⁶ Loury, *Race, and Incarceration*, 8.

²⁴⁷ Ryan King, “Disparity by Geography: The War on Drugs in America's Cities”, (Washington: *The Sentencing Project*, May 2008), 10.

not in the suburbs and not on college campuses”.²⁴⁸ Racial profiling and directed attacks on black civil rights and freedoms can be seen by the so called “stop and frisk” programs and over policing of black neighborhoods. New York police “are more likely to stop and frisk Blacks and Latinos than whites, even when this is not explained by different patterns of offending”. 87 percent of those stopped are Black and Latino even when they make up only a small fraction of the population of New York City. This statistic echoes prison population demographics that show how blacks and latinos make up over 60 percent of the prison population, yet only represent less than 15% of the population.²⁴⁹

The methods of over policing minority communities stem from the white fears of black rage and criminality, Victor Rios did a sociological study of minority male youth in Oakland, he explains how these youth were “harrassed, profiled, watched and disciplined at young ages before they had committed any crimes.”²⁵⁰ These young males “regularly received citations for minor offences like loitering, disturbing the peace and violating curfew,” many of these offenses are strikingly similar to the post-emancipation Vagrancy Acts that criminalized Blacks for loitering, unemployment and acted as social control mechanisms. From a young age minority communities come to view police as the enemy and representative of “The Man”.

Due to the economic conditions and lack of employment opportunities in these inner city ghettos, selling drugs becomes a way to become self sufficient and gain what can be seen as meaningful employment. The irony that pharmaceutical companies,

²⁴⁸ Marc Mauer and David Cole, “Five Myths About Incarceration,” *Washington Post*, June 17, 2011.

²⁴⁹ Leonard, *Crime and Inequality*, 283

²⁵⁰ Victor Rios, *Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys*, (New York: New York University Press, 2011), xv. Also See Leonard, *Crime and Inequality*, 185.

generally headed by whites, make billions in profits pushing legal drugs to American society is not lost on young blacks. Ali Vegas states in his song “Narcotics,” when discussing early doctor prescribed heroin remedies, he makes an interesting connection, he states that, “I [heroin] was accepted in America till I started making money for black people”.²⁵¹ Whether there is truth in this is not relevant, yet it must be fully rectified that mass incarceration is not due to high drug and/or crime rates, in fact as crime rates decreased in the 1990's “imprisonment rates remained high and continued upwards”.²⁵² It is no surprise then that the drug war was an enormous failure just as it is no surprise that when crime rates were going down, prisons were expanding. The reasons for this are simple, they were both meant for social control and not as calculated responses to crime and drug rates.

When one delves into the lobbying groups that campaign for tougher crime and mandatory sentencing policies, it is not coincidental that conservative groups lead the way. The recent documentary *The 13th* by Ava Duvernay explores the lobbying impact of the conservative group, American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC). These conservative “policymakers” initiated tough on crime bills that they would draft for politicians to submit to congress. The Nation reports on the actions of ALEC that, they:

helped pioneer some of the toughest sentencing laws on the books today, like mandatory minimums for non-violent drug offenders, “three strikes” laws, and “truth in sentencing” laws. In 1995 alone, ALEC’s Truth in Sentencing Act was signed into law in twenty-five states.²⁵³

²⁵¹ Ali Vegas, “Narcotics”, *Urban Wolves and Trackmasters Presents: Ali Vegas*, 2000. Also see Susan C. Boyd, “Drug Films, Justice, and Nationhood,” *Contemporary Justice Review*, vol. 10 no. 3 (2007): 266.

²⁵² Loury, *Race and Incarceration*, 4.

²⁵³ Mike Elk and Bob Sloan, “The Hidden History of ALEC and Prison Labor,” *The Nation*, August 1, 2011.

These policy changes, along with the militarization of police, more than any other factor is what enabled the rise of mass incarcerations. Leonard explains how most of the people in jail today are non-violent offenders, the explosion of the prison pop. is not due to high crime it is, “the result of harsh policies like mandatory sentencing”.²⁵⁴ In Act II, I discussed how white outrage against Johnson’s Civil Rights Act, affirmative action programs and liberal policies of the late 1960s, enabled conservative politicians to harness white anger to gain support for ‘law and order’ policies. As I stated above, conservative politicians were able to use this anti-black/anti-liberal sentiment to dominate political elections almost exclusively until the 1990s. This continuous conservative success forced oppositional candidates to implement a similar strategy. Bill Clinton would be the first Democrat to fully incorporate ‘law and order’ rhetoric into his presidential campaign. Clinton proved that it was white fears more than anything that fueled political success and the candidate who acted toughest on crime was usually the candidate that won.

In 1994, Clinton enacted the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, or simply the Crime Bill. This bill, which has been recently denounced by Clinton as a major factor that led to mass incarceration, greatly expanded the powers of police, prisons and the Criminal Justice System. Many of the laws passed under this bill enabled massive penalties for non-violent offenses, as the bill, “included a “three strikes” mandatory life sentence for repeat offenders, money to hire 100,000 new police officers, \$9.7bn in funding for prisons, and an expansion of death penalty-eligible

²⁵⁴ Leonard, *Inequality and Power*, 185.

offences”.²⁵⁵ The expansion of police, three strike laws and mandatory minimum sentencing laws are the major contributors to the expansion of prison not increased crime.

Conservative practices of scapegoating and fear mongering are nothing new, yet what I have been trying to convey is that in many ways liberals have either accepted and/or have been conditioned to view this rhetoric as reality. FBI data shows that 41% of those arrested for violent crimes in 1997 were black, yet surveys showed that a “plurality of respondents” believed that more than 60% of violent crimes were being committed by blacks.²⁵⁶ Entman and Rojecki believes this is due to the over - representation of Black criminality in mainstream news reports. Blacks are more likely to appear as criminals on the news and whites are far more likely to be shown as victims. Using media reports from Chicago, Entman and Rojecki argue that “by a 1.5:1 (241 to 160) ratio, white victims outnumber Blacks, even though Blacks are more likely to be victimized, the ratio of time spent on white victims to that of Blacks exceeded 3:1”.²⁵⁷

The ability of racialized images of white victims and Black criminals to fuel white conservative fears is nothing new. The portrayal of Blacks and Asians as criminals and drug dealers is also nothing new, it is actually built off of the same fears, namely the fear of interracial marriage and the rape of white women. A few early examples of such arguments can be found in such films as early as *Chinese Opium Den* (1894), *Birth of a Nation* (1915) and *Narcotics* (1933), whereas in Canada, *The Black Candle* by Emily

²⁵⁵ Jessica Lussenhop, Clinton Crime Bill: Why Is It So Controversial, *BBC News Magazine*, April 18, 2016.

²⁵⁶ Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Uniform Crime Reports for the United States 1997*, (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1998), 240.

²⁵⁷ Entman and Rojecki, *Black Image*, 81.

Murphy, reiterated these racialized myths. Susan Boyd argues in her article, “Drug Films Justice and Nationhood,” that drug films helped to support conservative and white supremacist rhetoric and that “drug films can be viewed as ‘accomplices’ to law-and-order regimes and ‘nation building’”.²⁵⁸ In more recent times such as during the presidential election of George Bush sr., the image of Willie Horton (a murderer who was given a weekend pass and then robbed and killed a white couple), were infused into anti-Dukakis campaign messages. Many have argued over the effective impact of such images on the actual election results, yet the purpose of promoting such an image is clear.²⁵⁹

Lastly, in order to fully understand how mass incarceration proliferated, we must take into account the privatization of prisons and the re-introduction of forced labor in the American economy. What we find when we begin to ask the question about private prisons and prison labor, Cui Bono? (to whom is it a benefit?) is beyond shocking for most. Heather Ann Thompson wrote a journal article entitled, “The Prison Industrial Complex: A Growth Industry in a Shrinking Economy,” in this article she examines how the private prison industry has been America’s largest growing industry for decades. The explosion of private prison stocks parallels the growth rate of technology giants in the 1990’s and U.S. taxpayers now spend roughly \$35 billion annually on prisons. Kitwana explains how, “a network of private corporations that provide every service imaginable to prison and inmates, from prison construction and operation to

²⁵⁸ Boyd, “Drug Films,” 265.

²⁵⁹ Entman and Rojecki, 92. Also see Ava Duvernay, *The 13th*.

telecommunications services, clothing, food and medicine,” are all fighting for a piece of the pie.²⁶⁰

Thompson identifies how private prison corporations “spend fortunes lobbying in the political arena,” corporations like Correction Corporations of America (CCA), Geo Group, Cornell Corrections and Management Training Corporations (MTC) spent millions to ensure that harsher sentencing laws were passed and parole opportunities reduced.²⁶¹ This ensured maximum occupancy, mainly with non-violent offenders, for their private prisons. There are now even private parole corporations such as Sentinel that charge parolee’s astronomical rates for basic amenities (similar to how companies like AT&T charge extortionist rates for inmate phone services). The fact is that these corporations have one thing in mind: profit, they do not care about providing social services, rehabilitation programs, safe medical treatment and/or adequate security. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Human Rights Watch and dozens of other human and civil rights organizations have been condemning this for-profit prison system for the decades. Recently, the truths about the appalling conditions of these facilities has been brought to light. The closing of the Walnut Grove facility run by MTC, that was referred to by a judge as “a picture of such horror as should be unrealized anywhere in the civilized world,” and the lawsuit against the East Mississippi Correctional Facility (EMCF) in Meridian, provide a stunning view of neglect and abuse.²⁶² These prisons have been referred to by some as “gladiator schools,” they are so understaffed and uncaring about their jobs, so much so, that gangs effectively run these facilities.

²⁶⁰ Bakari Kitwana, *Hip Hop Generation*, 71.

²⁶¹ Heather Ann Thompson, “The Prison Industrial Complex: A Growth Industry in a Shrinking Economy,” *New Labor Forum*, vol. 21, no. 3, (Fall 2012).

²⁶² ACLU, “Notorious Private Prison Closes Today in Walnut Grove, Mississippi,” September 15, 2016.

Conditions are abhorrent and upwards of 80% of inmates suffer from mental illness, but receive no treatment, anything that can be done to cut costs is done with no sympathy for the prisoners they are supposed to be providing for. Jody Owens, the Southern Poverty Law Center's managing attorney for Mississippi, put forth a damning statement in court when he described the lack of proper treatment, conditions and resources in these facilities, he argues that:

The result is a place so dangerous and so violent that it shocks corrections experts, yet the department keeps handing taxpayer money to private companies to run the prison and its services, rewarding them year after year for doing a horrific job.²⁶³

These facilities do not rehabilitate criminals, they harden them. Some young teens caught with a few grams of marijuana, heroin or crack, go to jail and are forced to join gangs, commit violence in self-defence or as initiation and suffer serious instances of mental and physical abuse, not only from other inmates but from guards as well.

The other factor that plays a role in private prisons, and one that is relatively comparable to convict leasing in post-Civil War American society, is the forced labor of prisoners. Today, instead of hiring out convict laborers to whites, corporations make billions in profits off of selling products, made, packaged and/or labeled in American prisons. Thompson argues that convict leasing was profitable up until labor unions and activists began demanding for reforms, urging for minimum wages and an end to free or extremely low cost prison labor. She describes how:

In the wake of New Deal legislation such as the Hawes-Cooper Act, the Ashurst-Sumners Act, and the Walsh-Healey Act—which prohibited the sale of prison labor goods to any entity other

²⁶³ *ACLU*, "Five-Week Trial Exposes Inhuman Unconstitutional Conditions At Mississippi Prison Operated By Private Contractors," April 9, 2018.

than state-owned institutions and outlawed the sale of such goods across state lines—and newly empowered by the Wagner Act, the American labor movement began to thrive.²⁶⁴

These new legislative acts forced corporations to pay prison laborers minimum wages and provide them with certain benefits, this forced companies to divest from prison labor. That was until neo-liberal policies in the 1960's and finally the Justice System Improvement Act of 1979, re-enabled corporations to lower prison worker wages. By the 1990's, "more than half the states have passed laws allowing corporate access to inmate laborers..., with rates of pay as low as 50 cents an hour or in some cases \$3 a day, companies like TWA, Microsoft, Victoria's Secret, and even Toys R Us" along with Starbucks, Idaho Potatoes and countless others, "have taken advantage of [what is] virtually slave labor".²⁶⁵

Historically, jails and police have been used as oppressive tools to disrupt activist movements throughout American history, during the Civil Right Movement jails-ins (blacks voluntarily going to jail), were a way to protest against this. It is interesting how one of the first actions following 9/11 and the signing of the Patriot Act, was the placing of Assata Shakur on the FBI's "Terrorists Most Wanted List". To Professor Lisa Corrigan, this signifies and continues the symbolic underlying theme of utilizing 'law and order' rhetoric, and now the fear of terrorism, to justify the oppressive actions taken on behalf of the government in the name of the American people.²⁶⁶ Shakur is a member of the Black Liberation Army (BLA) and was convicted of killing a police officer, (although she did not pull the trigger) in 1973. She escaped from jail and fled to Cuba. Shakur and

²⁶⁴ Thompson, "Prison Growth Industry".

²⁶⁵ Bakari Kitwana, *Hip Hop Generation*, 73.

²⁶⁶ Corrigan, *Prison Power*, 125-146.

the BLA were targeted by COINTELPRO and Operation NEWKILL, effectively pushing them underground.²⁶⁷ The prison writings of black revolutionaries have become the new centers of Black Power resistance as they make their voices heard, even while trapped inside the belly of the beast. These Black leaders have been branded by many as, “cop killers,” such figures as Mumia Abu Jamal and Jamal Al-Amin (formerly, H. Rap Brown) have both provided exceptional insights into the diabolical nature of the CJS and PIC.²⁶⁸

Police in America are seen in two different lights, one is of a protector of communities and the upholders of law and order; on the other side, many see police as agents of oppression and the physical manifestation of white dominance. The juxtaposition of these two perspectives elucidates that they are not antonymous, yet there is no doubt that minorities have been the most disproportionately affected by instances of excessive force from police. The website MappingPoliceViolence.org recorded and analysed police and media reports to find that, “1,147 people were killed in 2017 by police,” that is an average of 3 per day. In there charts mapping police violence in major cities they found that 41 percent of those killed in cities were Black, despite being less than 20 percent of the population.²⁶⁹ The Atlantic put out an article that compiles data from FBI and news media sources to show that, “black males 15-34 are between nine to sixteen times more likely to be killed by police then other people”.²⁷⁰ There is no doubt that police brutality is disproportionately directed at minorities, many of the urban riots in the last few decades can be seen as rebellions

²⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 140-1.

²⁶⁸ See Mumia Abu Jamal, *Live From Death Row*, (New York: Perennial, 1995). And the 2002 re released version of Jamal Al-Amin, *Die Niggers Die!*, (New York: Dial Press, 1969).

²⁶⁹ 2015 National Police Report, *MappingPoliceViolence.org*, Accessed from <https://mappingpoliceviolence.org/2015/> on August 05, 2018.

²⁷⁰ Olga Khazan, “How Many People are Killed By Police Each Year?”, *The Atlantic*, May 8, 2018.

against such flagrant and increased instances of police violence. In the early twentieth century, klan members would be deputized and aided police in their repression of minority groups. Today police do not overtly associate themselves with such blatant symbols of white supremacy, yet in many ways they still fill the role of maintaining racial hierarchies by stigmatizing and oversurveilling urban minority communities.

The racialized repressive actions of the police towards blacks and the subsequent silent support from most Americans is the product of socially conditioned population that has come to accept Black criminality as fact not fiction. This is the result media's overrepresentation of Black criminality or the "Censorship Frame" and the misrepresentations of Blacks in pop-culture as ultra-violent, hypersexualized studs, bitches and gangsters. Police respond to the plight of Blacks in America with the same apathy as the majority of whites do, they ignore it, fear it, then fear turns to hate and violence. The high profile shootings of Trayvon Martin in 2012 and more recently, Freddie Gray and Michael Brown, reignited public outrage mainly from Blacks, (sparking the Black Lives Matter protest movement), against police brutality in Ferguson, Baltimore and throughout many major American cities.

On February 26, 2012, George Zimmerman shot and killed Trayvon Martin in a gated community in Sanford, Florida. Zimmerman was the neighborhood watch coordinator for the gated community. The simple sight of a single young black male walking through this community was deemed by Zimmerman as suspicious enough to warrant pursuit, even though the police told him stand down. The fear of a black male encroaching on white suburban communities is what motivated Zimmerman to follow and eventually shoot Martin, who had nothing more than a pack of skittles and was

staying with family that lived in the community. This scene is eerily reminiscent of similar incidents that continuously took place throughout white suburban “sundown towns”. This tragic event helps to illuminate the impact of decades, if not centuries of, conservative rhetoric, pop-culture and media conditioning on American society. I will leave you here with a quote from Wyclef Jean, who wrote a song called *Justice (If You 17)* to lament on the lost opportunities and impact of this racialized conditioning and the black response to it. He warns black youth to “watch out for the neighborhood watch,” and sings that:

If you seventeen and you wearing a hoodie, on the phone talking to ya shorty, make no mistake there's one like you in every city, you know the story, he gonna creep up from behind, have you leave earth before your time. By the time po-po [police] show up, he gonna say he was so scared that he shot you up. He [Trayvon] could of been the next president, he could have been the next steve jobs,..., so until we get justice we won't stop, watch out for the neighborhood watch..., Freedom For Trayvon!

-Wyclef Jean, *Justice (Neighborhood Watch)*, 2013.

Conclusion

In this paper we have looked at the historical evolution of white racist ideologies in America. This paper has focused on the impact of these beliefs on Black Americans, but Blacks have not been the only minority affected by white racism in America. Asian Americans, Latino Americans and Native Americans all have suffered a similar experience throughout American history. At the root of all of the pain and struggle is white racism.

In Chapter 1, the fundamental ideological frameworks, utilized by white supremacists to justify slavery and theories of “Black inferiority,” were examined. Religious and pseudo-scientific theories sought to “prove” that Blacks were subhuman and many of these beliefs became institutionalized within Post-Civil War American society and within early forms of American pop-culture. Southern Paternalist myths and white racialized stereotypes of Blacks became the dominant cultural representation of blackness that whites reproduced to entertain/condition whites, while demeaning Blacks at the same time. The southern economy was dependent upon Black slave labor and it could not function without it. Many whites in the North were also not willing to fully accept Blacks and violence (in the form of lynchings, race riots, etc.), was the primary means to enforce racial hierarchies, disenfranchise Black voters and solidify the white poor and working class. The criminalization of Black males and the convict leasing system quickly became a new way for whites to re-establish “slave” labor, and the myth of the Black criminal was born.

In 1896, segregation and discrimination became legalized and Jim Crow laws reinforced racial hierarchies in every social interaction. By the late 1960s Blacks began

challenging Jim Crow, from bus stop protests to lunch counter sit ins. The Civil Rights Movement was very successful in breaking the racial barriers of segregation and by the late 60s, Black Power unified and organized Black communities all across America.

In Chapter 2, state agencies and their responses to urban riots and their role in the counter-subversion of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements is discussed. In response to increasing urban riots/rebellions in American inner cities, President Johnson created the Kerner Commission, who declared that improved housing, better jobs, social services and more funding for schools, all were required in order for any successful integration to garner success. Johnson enacted policies in line with these recommendations, yet many of these policies could not get enough support and conservatives like Nixon soon began to condemn them as creating “welfare dependency”. Affirmative action programs, social services and many other liberal policies were quickly discarded and replaced with more “law and order” style policies that favored police over social services and jails over schools. White fears of Black criminality and white supremacist attempts to maintain racial hierarchy led to the FBI and police to target Civil Rights groups and discredit/destroy them. The FBI was successful in its COINTELPRO methods aimed to neutralize, subvert and eliminate Black Power. Black Power leaders were effectively killed or driven underground leaving the streets in disarray and enabling gangs to fill the power vacuum left by the death of the BPP.

In Chapter 3, the impact of the suppression of Black leaders and the effect of racialized pop-cultural images on the Hip Hop Generation is explored. From Blaxploitation to hood films and gangster rap, the white control of mainstream pop-

cultural images is a prevalent tool in the maintenance of racial hierarchy and social control. Blaxploitation was created and revolutionized by Blacks, yet when whites took over production paternalistic and racialized stereotypes prevailed. Hood films and gangster rap would share the same fate, because white studios and producers control the images that dominate the mainstream. As stated above, it is the oversaturation of media and pop-cultural messages with racialized imagery of Black criminality, misogyny and violence that is the problem, not the films and/or songs themselves. Prisons and police in the Hip Hop Generation, have become more militarized and America imprisons exponentially more people on earth than any other nation. The criminalization of blackness in the twenty first century is ever present, from the media “Censorship Frame,” to the rejection of Black middle class representations in Hollywood, to the overrepresentation of thugs and gangsters in mainstream Hip Hop at the turn of the Millenium. The state of hyper-surveillance and over policing that is directed at Blacks is not due to Black crime rates as explained above, but to the “law and order” policies that are the result of white racialized cultural narratives and pop-cultural social conditioning. Prisons and police today stand as the physical forces of white domination and the defenders of racial hierarchies in America, and many whites have been so conditioned to fear Black criminality that they accept the largest mass incarceration regime that has ever existed on the face of this planet.

Trayvon Martin was killed not because he was a criminal or because he was dangerous, he was killed because of generations of social conditioning of whites to fear the “other.” Minorities in American society will continue to become political and white supremacist scapegoats as long as white Americans allow their politicians, media and

pop-culture to preconstruct cultural narratives and play on white fears in every time of trouble. Money is power in America today and whites, being the biggest population group, have the largest purchasing power. They can influence the images that seep into the mainstream by refusing to support media, music or films that promote racial stereotypes/ misrepresentations. The notions of a post-racial society, is a nice fantasy, but it is not the reality today. The more whites lull themselves to sleep believing that American society is equal and fair to everyone, and willfully ignore the plight of post-industrial American urban centres, the more unequal and divided their society will become. Only through compassion, understanding and cooperation, can an end to America's original sin be found.

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